This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

AL 2992.3.10(21)

Harvard College
Library

From the Fund in Memory of
Humphrey Almy Gifford
Class of 1912

The Bequest of his Father
William L. R. Gifford
Class of 1884

Montezuma Edition

THE WORKS OF WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT

TWENTY-TWO VOLUMES

Vol. XXI.

The Montezuma Edition of William H. Prescott's Works is limited to one thousand copies. Of these one hundred are for England, of which this is

No. 26

LOUIS XIV. DISCOVERING THE PORTRAIT OF MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE IN THE APARTMENTS OF FOUQUET.

Montezuma Edition

BIOGRAPHICAL

AND

Critical Miscellanies

BY

WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

WILFRED HAROLD MUNRO

PROFESSOR OF EUROPEAN HISTORY IN BROWN UNIVERSITY

VOL. II

LONDON

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

5 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

AL 2992.3.10 (2)

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
JUL 19 1961

Copyright, 1868, by George Ticknor
Copyright, 1904, by J. B. Lippincott Company

Electrotyped and Printed by
J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, U. S. A.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II

	PAGE
MOLIÈRE	9
ITALIAN NARRATIVE POETRY	57
POETRY AND ROMANCE OF THE ITALIANS	133
SCOTTISH SONG	214
DA PONTE'S OBSERVATIONS	242
TICKNOR'S HISTORY OF SPANISH LITERATURE	284

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

LOUIS XIV. DISCOVERING THE PORTRAIT OF MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE IN THE APARTMENTS OF FOUQUET.... *Frontispiece*
Original illustration by Paul Albert Laurens.

A DINNER AT THE HOUSE OF MOLIÈRE..... 16
After the Painting by Mélingue.

DANTE AND BEATRICE..... 136
After the Painting by Maignan.

PORTRAIT OF PETRARCH..... 146
From a Miniature of the 14th Century.

THE DECAMERON..... 170
After the Painting by Sorbi.

BIOGRAPHICAL
AND
CRITICAL MISCELLANIES

MOLIÈRE *

(October, 1828)

THE French surpass every other nation, indeed all the other nations of Europe put together, in the amount and excellence of their memoirs. Whence comes this manifest superiority? The important Collection relating to the History of France, commencing as early as the thirteenth century, forms a basis of civil history more authentic, circumstantial, and satisfactory to an intelligent inquirer than is to be found among any other people; and the multitude of biographies, personal anecdotes, and similar scattered notices which have appeared in France during the two last centuries throw a flood of light on the social habits and general civilization of the period in which they were written. The Italian histories (and every considerable city in Italy, says Tiraboschi, had its historian as early as the thirteenth century) are fruitful only in wars, massacres, treasonable conspiracies, or diplomatic intrigues, matters that affect the tranquillity of the state. The rich body of Spanish chronicles, which maintain an unbroken succession from the reign of Alphonso the Wise to that of Philip the Second, are scarcely more personal or interesting in their details, unless it be in reference to the sovereign and his imme-

* "Histoire de la Vie et des Ouvrages de Molière. Par J. Taschereau." Paris. 1825.

diate court. Even the English, in their memoirs and autobiographies of the last century, are too exclusively confined to topics of public notoriety, as the only subject worthy of record or which can excite a general interest in their readers. Not so with the French. The most frivolous details assume in their eyes an importance when they can be made illustrative of an eminent character; and even when they concern one of less note, they become sufficiently interesting, as just pictures of life and manners. Hence, instead of exhibiting their hero only as he appears on the great theatre, they carry us along with him into retirement, or into those social circles where, stripped of his masquerade dress, he can indulge in all the natural gayety of his heart,—in those frivolities and follies which display the real character much better than all his premeditated wisdom; those little nothings which make up so much of the sum of French memoirs, but which, however amusing, are apt to be discarded by their more serious English neighbors as something derogatory to their hero. Where shall we find a more lively portraiture of that interesting period when feudal barbarism began to fade away before the civilized institutions of modern times, than in Philip de Comines' sketches of the courts of France and Burgundy in the latter half of the fifteenth century? where a more nice development of the fashionable intrigues, the corrupt Machiavelian politics, which animated the little coteries, male and female, of Paris, under the regency of Anne of Austria, than in the Memoirs of De Retz?—to say nothing of

the vast amount of similar contributions in France during the last century, which, in the shape of letters and anecdotes, as well as memoirs, have made us as intimately acquainted with the internal movements of society in Paris, under all its aspects, literary, fashionable, and political, as if they had passed in review before our own eyes.

The French have been remarked for their excellence in narrative ever since the times of the *fabliaux* and the old Norman romances. Somewhat of their success in this way may be imputed to the structure of their language, whose general currency, and whose peculiar fitness for prose composition, have been noticed from a very early period. Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, wrote his *Tesoro* in French, in preference to his own tongue, as far back as the middle of the thirteenth century, on the ground "that its speech was the most universal and most delectable of all the dialects of Europe." And Dante asserts in his treatise "on Vulgar Eloquence" that "the superiority of the French consists in its adaptation, by means of its facility and agreeableness, to narratives in prose." Much of the wild, artless grace, the *naïveté,* which characterized it in its infancy, has been gradually polished away by fastidious critics, and can scarcely be said to have survived Marot and Montaigne. But the language has gained considerably in perspicuity, precision, and simplicity of construction, to which the jealous labors of the French Academy must be admitted to have contributed essentially. This simplicity of construction, refusing those com-

plicated inversions so usual in the other languages of the Continent, and its total want of prosody, though fatal to poetical purposes, have greatly facilitated its acquisition to foreigners, and have made it a most suitable vehicle for conversation. Since the time of Louis the Fourteenth, accordingly, it has become the language of the courts and the popular medium of communication in most of the countries of Europe. Since that period, too, it has acquired a number of elegant phrases and familiar turns of expression, which have admirably fitted it for light, popular narrative, like that which enters into memoirs, letter-writing, and similar kinds of composition.

The character and situation of the writers themselves may account still better for the success of the French in this department. Many of them, as Joinville, Sully, Comines, De Thou, Rochefoucault, Torcy, have been men of rank and education, the counsellors or the friends of princes, acquiring from experience a shrewd perception of the character and of the forms of society. Most of them have been familiarized in those polite circles which, in Paris more than any other capital, seem to combine the love of dissipation and fashion with a high relish for intellectual pursuits. The state of society in France, or, what is the same thing, in Paris, is admirably suited to the purposes of the memoir-writer. The cheerful, gregarious temper of the inhabitants, which mingles all ranks in the common pursuit of pleasure, the external polish, which scarcely deserts them in the commission of the grossest violence, the

influence of the women, during the last two centuries, far superior to that of the sex among any other people, and exercised alike on matters of taste, politics, and letters, the gallantry and licentious intrigues so usual in the higher classes of this gay metropolis, and which fill even the life of a man of letters, so stagnant in every other country, with stirring and romantic adventure,—all these, we say, make up a rich and varied panorama, that can hardly fail of interest under the hand of the most common artist.

Lastly, the vanity of the French may be considered as another cause of their success in this kind of writing,—a vanity which leads them to disclose a thousand amusing particulars which the reserve of an Englishman, and perhaps his pride, would discard as altogether unsuitable to the public ear. This vanity, it must be confessed, however, has occasionally seduced their writers, under the garb of confessions and secret memoirs, to make such a disgusting exposure of human infirmity as few men would be willing to admit, even to themselves.

The best memoirs of late produced in France seem to have assumed somewhat of a novel shape. While they are written with the usual freedom and vivacity, they are fortified by a body of references and illustrations that attest an unwonted degree of elaboration and research. Such are those of Rousseau, La Fontaine, and Molière, lately published. The last of these, which forms the subject of our article, is a compilation of all that has ever been recorded of the life of Molière.

It is executed in an agreeable manner, and has the merit of examining, with more accuracy than has been hitherto done, certain doubtful points in his biography, and of assembling together in a convenient form what has before been diffused over a great variety of surface. But, however familiar most of these particulars may be to the countrymen of Molière (by far the greatest comic genius in his own nation, and, in very many respects, inferior to none in any other), they are not so current elsewhere as to lead us to imagine that some account of his life and literary labors would be altogether unacceptable to our readers.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (Molière) was born in Paris, January 15, 1622. His father was an upholsterer, as his grandfather had been before him; and the young Poquelin was destined to exercise the same hereditary craft, to which, indeed, he served an apprenticeship until the age of fourteen. In this determination his father was confirmed by the office which he had obtained for himself, in connection with his original vocation, of *valet de chambre* to the king, with the promise of a reversion of it to his son on his own decease. The youth accordingly received only such a meagre elementary education as was usual with the artisans of that day. But a secret consciousness of his own powers convinced him that he was destined by nature for higher purposes than that of quilting sofas and hanging tapestry. His occasional presence at the theatrical representations of the Hôtel de Bourgogne is said also to have awakened in his mind, at this period,

a passion for the drama. He therefore solicited his father to assist him in obtaining more liberal instruction; and when the latter at length yielded to the repeated entreaties of his son, it was with the reluctance of one who imagines that he is spoiling a good mechanic in order to make a poor scholar. He was accordingly introduced into the Jesuits' College of Clermont, where he followed the usual course of study for five years with diligence and credit. He was fortunate enough to pursue the study of philosophy under the direction of the celebrated Gassendi, with his fellow-pupils, Chapelle the poet, afterwards his intimate friend, and Bernier, so famous subsequently for his travels in the East, but who, on his return, had the misfortune to lose the favor of Louis the Fourteenth by replying to him, that "of all the countries he had ever seen, he preferred Switzerland."

On the completion of his studies, in 1641, he was required to accompany the king, then Louis the Thirteenth, in his capacity of *valet de chambre* (his father being detained in Paris by his infirmities), on an excursion to the south of France. This journey afforded him the opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with the habits of the court, as well as those of the provinces, of which he afterwards so repeatedly availed himself in his comedies. On his return he commenced the study of the law, and had completed it, it would appear, when his old passion for the theatre revived with increased ardor, and, after some hesitation, he determined no longer to withstand the

decided impulse of his genius. He associated himself with one of those city companies of players with which Paris had swarmed since the days of Richelieu,—a minister who aspired after the same empire in the republic of letters which he had so long maintained over the state, and whose ostentatious patronage eminently contributed to develop that taste for dramatic exhibition which has distinguished his countrymen ever since.

The consternation of the elder Poquelin on receiving the intelligence of his son's unexpected determination may be readily conceived. It blasted at once all the fair promise which the rapid progress the latter had made in his studies justified him in forming, and it degraded him to an unfortunate profession, esteemed at that time even more lightly in France than it has been in other countries. The humiliating dependence of the comedian on the popular favor, the daily exposure of his person to the caprice and insults of an unfeeling audience, the numerous temptations incident to his precarious and unsettled life, may furnish abundant objections to this profession in the mind of every parent. But in France, to all these objections were superadded others of a graver cast, founded on religion. The clergy there, alarmed at the rapidly-increasing taste for dramatic exhibitions, openly denounced these elegant recreations as an insult to the Deity; and the pious father anticipated, in this preference of his son, his spiritual no less than his temporal perdition. He actually made an earnest remonstrance to him to this effect, through the intervention of

A DINNER AT THE HOUSE OF MOLIÈRE.

one of his friends, who, however, instead of converting the youth, was himself persuaded to join the company then organizing under his direction. But his family were never reconciled to his proceeding; and even at a later period of his life, when his splendid successes in his new career had shown how rightly he had understood the character of his own genius, they never condescended to avail themselves of the freedom of admission to his theatre, which he repeatedly proffered. M. Bret, his editor, also informs us that he had himself seen a genealogical tree in the possession of the descendants of this same family, in which the name of Molière was not even admitted! Unless it were to trace their connection with so illustrious a name, what could such a family want of a genealogical tree? It was from a deference to these scruples that our hero annexed to his patronymic the name of Molière, by which alone he has been recognized by posterity.

During the three following years he continued playing in Paris, until the turbulent regency of Anne of Austria withdrew the attention of the people from the quiet pleasures of the drama to those of civil broil and tumult. Molière then quitted the capital for the south of France. From this period, 1646 to 1658, his history presents few particulars worthy of record. He wandered with his company through the different provinces, writing a few farces which have long since perished, performing at the principal cities, and, wherever he went, by his superior talent withdrawing the crowd from every other spectacle to the exhibition of his

own. During this period, too, he was busily storing his mind with those nice observations of men and manners so essential to the success of the dramatist, and which were to ripen there until a proper time for their development should arrive. At the town of Pezénas they still show an elbow-chair of Molière's (as at Montpellier they show the gown of Rabelais), in which the poet, it is said, ensconced in a corner of a barber's shop, would sit for the hour together, silently watching the air, gestures, and grimaces of the village politicians, who in those days, before coffee-houses were introduced into France, used to congregate in this place of resort. The fruits of this study may be easily discerned in those original draughts of character from the middling and lower classes with which his pieces everywhere abound.

In the south of France he met with the Prince of Conti, with whom he had contracted a friendship at the college of Clermont, and who received him with great hospitality. The prince pressed upon him the office of his private secretary; but, fortunately for letters, Molière was constant in his devotion to the drama, assigning as his reason that "the occupation was of too serious a complexion to suit his taste, and that, though he might make a passable author, he should make a very poor secretary." Perhaps he was influenced in this refusal, also, by the fate of the preceding incumbent, who had lately died of a fever, in consequence of a blow from the fire-tongs, which his highness, in a fit of ill humor, had given him on the temple. However this may be, it was owing

to the good offices of the prince that he obtained access to Monsieur, the only brother of Louis the Fourteenth, and father of the celebrated regent, Philip of Orleans, who, on his return to Paris in 1658, introduced him to the king, before whom, in the month of October following, he was allowed, with his company, to perform a tragedy of Corneille's and one of his own farces.

His little corps was now permitted to establish itself under the title of the "Company of Monsieur," and the theatre of the Petit-Bourbon was assigned as the place for its performances. Here, in the course of a few weeks, he brought out his *Etourdi* and *Le Dépit Amoureux,* comedies in verse and in five acts, which he had composed during his provincial pilgrimage, and which, although deficient in an artful *liaison* of scenes and in probability of incident, exhibit, particularly the last, those fine touches of the ridiculous, which revealed the future author of the *Tartuffe* and the *Misanthrope.* They indeed found greater favor with the audience than some of his later pieces; for in the former they could only compare him with the wretched models that had preceded him, while in the latter they were to compare him with himself.

In the ensuing year Molière exhibited his celebrated farce of *Les Précieuses Ridicules;* a piece in only one act, but which, by its inimitable satire, effected such a revolution in the literary taste of his countrymen as has been accomplished by few works of a more imposing form, and which may be considered as the basis of the dramatic glory of

Molière, and the dawn of good comedy in France. This epoch was the commencement of that brilliant period in French literature which is so well known as the age of Louis the Fourteenth; and yet it was distinguished by such a puerile, meretricious taste as is rarely to be met with except in the incipient stages of civilization or in its last decline. The cause of this melancholy perversion of intellect is mainly imputable to the influence of a certain *coterie* of wits, whose rank, talents, and successful authorship had authorized them in some measure to set up as the arbiters of taste and fashion. This choice assembly, consisting of the splenetic Rochefoucault, the *bel-esprit* Voiture, Balzac, whose letters afford the earliest example of numbers in French prose, the lively and licentious Bussy-Rabutin, Chapelain, who, as a wit has observed, might still have had a reputation had it not been for his "Pucelle," the poet Benserade, Ménage, and others of less note, together with such eminent women as Madame Lafayette, Mademoiselle Scudéri (whose eternal romances, the delight of her own age, have been the despair of every other), and even the elegant Sévigné, was accustomed to hold its *réunions* principally at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, the residence of the marchioness of that name, and which from this circumstance has acquired such ill-omened notoriety in the history of letters.

Here they were wont to hold the most solemn discussions on the most frivolous topics, but especially on matters relating to gallantry and love, which they debated with all the subtlety and meta-

physical refinement that centuries before had characterized the romantic Courts of Love in the south of France. All this was conducted in an affected jargon, in which the most common things, instead of being called by their usual names, were signified by ridiculous periphrases, which, while it required neither wit nor ingenuity to invent them, could have had no other merit, even in their own eyes, than that of being unintelligible to the vulgar. To this was superadded a tone of exaggerated sentiment, and a ridiculous code of etiquette, by which the intercourse of these *exclusives* was to be regulated with each other, all borrowed from the absurd romances of Calprenède and Scudéri. Even the names of the parties underwent a metamorphosis, and Madame de Rambouillet's Christian name of *Catherine,* being found too trite and unpoetical, was converted into *Arthénice,* by which she was so generally recognized as to be designated by it in Fléchier's eloquent funeral oration on her daughter.* These insipid affectations, which French critics are fond of imputing to an Italian influence, savor quite as much of the Spanish *cultismo* as of the *concetti* of the former nation, and may be yet more fairly referred to the same false principles of taste which distinguished the French Pleiades of the sixteenth century, and the more ancient compositions of their Provençal ancestors. Dictionaries were compiled and treatises written illustrative of this precious vocabu-

* How comes La Harpe to fall into the error of supposing that Fléchier referred to Madame Montausier by this epithet of *Arthénice?* The bishop's style in this passage is as unequivocal as usual. See Cours de Littérature, etc., tome vi. p. 167.

lary; all were desirous of being initiated into the mysteries of so elegant a science; even such men as Corneille and Bossuet did not disdain to frequent the saloons where it was studied; the spirit of imitation, more active in France than in other countries, took possession of the provinces; every village had its coterie of *précieuses* after the fashion of the capital, and a false taste and criticism threatened to infect the very sources of pure and healthful literature.

It was against this fashionable corruption that Molière aimed his wit in the little satire of the *Précieuses Ridicules,* in which the valets of two noblemen are represented as aping their masters' tone of conversation for the purpose of imposing on two young ladies fresh from the provinces and great admirers of the new style. The absurdity of these affectations is still more strongly relieved by the contemptuous incredulity of the father and servant, who do not comprehend a word of them. By this process Molière succeeded both in exposing and degrading these absurd pretensions, as he showed how opposite they were to common sense and how easily they were to be acquired by the most vulgar minds. The success was such as might have been anticipated on an appeal to popular feeling, where nature must always triumph over the arts of affectation. The piece was welcomed with enthusiastic applause, and the disciples of the Hôtel Rambouillet, most of whom were present at the first exhibition, beheld the fine fabric which they had been so painfully constructing brought to the ground by a single blow.

"And these follies," said Ménage to Chapelain, "which you and I see so finely criticised here, are what we have been so long admiring. We must go home and burn our idols." "Courage, Molière!" cried an old man from the pit; "this is genuine comedy." The price of the seats was doubled from the time of the second representation. Nor were the effects of the satire merely transitory. It converted an epithet of praise into one of reproach; and a *femme précieuse*, a *style précieux*, a *ton précieux*, once so much admired, have ever since been used only to signify the most ridiculous affectation.

There was, in truth, however, quite as much luck as merit in this success of Molière, whose production exhibits no finer raillery or better-sustained dialogue than are to be found in many of his subsequent pieces. It assured him, however, of his own strength, and disclosed to him the mode in which he should best hit the popular taste. "I have no occasion to study Plautus or Terence any longer," said he: "I must henceforth study the world." The world, accordingly, was his study; and the exquisite models of character which it furnished him will last as long as it shall endure.

In 1660 he brought out the excellent comedy of the *Ecole des Maris*, and in the course of the same month, that of the *Fâcheux*, in three acts,—composed, learned, and performed within the brief space of a fortnight; an expedition evincing the dexterity of the manager no less than that of the author. This piece was written at the request of Fouquet, superintendent of finances to Louis the

Fourteenth, for the magnificent *fête* at Vaux, given by him to that monarch, and lavishly celebrated in the memoirs of the period, and with yet more elegance in a poetical epistle of La Fontaine to his friend De Maucroix. This minister had been intrusted with the principal care of the finances under Cardinal Mazarin, and had been continued in the same office by Louis the Fourteenth, on his own assumption of the government. The monarch, however, alarmed at the growing dilapidations of the revenue, requested from the superintendent an *exposé* of its actual condition, which, on receiving, he privately communicated to Colbert, the rival and successor of Fouquet. The latter, whose ordinary expenditure far exceeded that of any other subject in the kingdom, and who, in addition to immense sums occasionally lost at play and daily squandered on his debaucheries, is said to have distributed in pensions more than four millions of livres annually, thought it would be an easy matter to impose on a young and inexperienced prince, who had hitherto shown himself more devoted to pleasure than business, and accordingly gave in false returns, exaggerating the expenses, and diminishing the actual receipts of the treasury. The detection of this peculation determined Louis to take the first occasion of dismissing his powerful minister; but his ruin was precipitated and completed by the discovery of an indiscreet passion for Madame de la Vallière, whose fascinating graces were then beginning to acquire for her that ascendency over the youthful monarch which has since condemned her name to

such unfortunate celebrity. The portrait of this lady, seen in the apartments of the favorite on the occasion to which we have adverted, so incensed Louis that he would have had him arrested on the spot but for the seasonable intervention of the queen-mother, who reminded him that Fouquet was his host. It was for this *fête* at Vaux, whose palace and ample domains, covering the extent of three villages, had cost their proprietor the sum, almost incredible for that period, of eighteen million livres, that Fouquet put in requisition all the various talents of the capital, the dexterity of its artists, and the invention of its finest poets. He was particularly lavish in his preparations for the dramatic portion of the entertainment. Le Brun passed for a while from his victories of Alexander to paint the theatrical decorations; Torelli was employed to contrive the machinery; Pelisson furnished the prologue, much admired in its day, and Molière his comedy of the *Fâcheux*.

This piece, the hint for which may have been suggested by Horace's ninth satire, *Ibam forte viâ Sacrâ*, is an amusing caricature of the various *bores* that infest society, rendered the more vexatious by their intervention at the very moment when a young lover is hastening to the place of assignation with his mistress. Louis the Fourteenth, after the performance, seeing his master of the hunts near him, M. Soyecour, a personage remarkably absent, and inordinately devoted to the pleasures of the chase, pointed him out to Molière as an original whom he had omitted to bring upon his canvas. The poet took the hint, and the following day pro-

duced an excellent scene, where this Nimrod is made to go through the *technics* of his art, in which he had himself, with great complaisance, instructed the mischievous satirist, who had drawn him into a conversation for that very purpose on the preceding evening.

This play was the origin of the *comédie-ballet,* afterwards so popular in France. The residence at Vaux brought Molière more intimately in contact with the king and the court than he had before been; and from this time may be dated the particular encouragement which he ever after received from this prince, and which eventually enabled him to triumph over the malice of his enemies. A few days after this magnificent entertainment, Fouquet was thrown into prison, where he was suffered to languish the remainder of his days, "which," says the historian from whom we have gathered these details, "he terminated *in sentiments of the most sincere piety;*"* a termination by no means uncommon in France with that class of persons, of either sex, respectively, who have had the misfortune to survive their fortune or their beauty.

In February, 1662, Molière formed a matrimonial connection with Mademoiselle Béjart, a young comedian of his company, who had been educated under his own eye, and whose wit and captivating graces had effectually ensnared the poet's heart, but for which he was destined to perform doleful penance the remainder of his life. The disparity of their ages—for the lady was

* Histoire de la Vie, etc., de La Fontaine, par M. Valckenaer. Paris, 1824.

hardly seventeen—might have afforded in itself a sufficient objection; and he had no reason to flatter himself that she would remain uninfected by the pernicious example of the society in which she had been educated, and of which he himself was not altogether an immaculate member. In his excellent comedy of the *Ecole des Femmes,* brought forward the same year, the story turns upon the absurdity of an old man's educating a young woman for the purpose, at some future time, of marrying her, which wise plan is defeated by the unseasonable apparition of a young lover, who in five minutes undoes what it had cost the veteran so many years to contrive. The pertinency of this moral to the poet's own situation shows how much easier it is to talk wisely than to act so.

This comedy, popular as it was on its representation, brought upon the head of its author a tempest of parody, satire, and even slander, from those of his own craft who were jealous of his unprecedented success, and from those literary *petits-maîtres* who still smarted with the stripes inflicted on them in some of his previous performances. One of this latter class, incensed at the applauses bestowed upon the piece on the night of its first representation, indignantly exclaimed, *Ris donc, parterre! ris donc!* "Laugh then, pit, if you will!" and immediately quitted the theatre.

Molière was not slow in avenging himself of these interested criticisms, by means of a little piece entitled *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes,* in which he brings forward the various objections made to his comedy and ridicules them with un-

sparing severity. These objections appear to have been chiefly of a verbal nature. A few such familiar phrases as *tarte à la crême, enfans par l'oreille,* etc., gave particular offence to the purists of that day, and, in the prudish spirit of French criticism, have since been condemned by Voltaire and La Harpe as unworthy of comedy. One of the personages introduced into the *Critique* is a marquis, who, when repeatedly interrogated as to the nature of his objections to the comedy, has no other answer to make than by his eternal *tarte à la crême.* The Duc de Feuillade, a coxcomb of little brains but great pretension, was the person generally supposed to be here intended. The peer, unequal to an encounter of wits with his antagonist, resorted to a coarser remedy. Meeting Molière one day in the gallery at Versailles, he advanced as if to embrace him,—a civility which the great lords of that day occasionally condescended to bestow upon their inferiors. As the unsuspecting poet inclined himself to receive the salute, the duke, seizing his head between his hands, rubbed it briskly against the buttons of his coat, repeating, at the same time, "*Tarte à la crême, Monsieur, tarte à la crême.*" The king, on receiving intelligence of this affront, was highly indignant, and reprimanded the duke with great asperity. He at the same time encouraged Molière to defend himself with his own weapons; a privilege of which he speedily availed himself, in a caustic little satire in one act, entitled *Impromptu de Versailles.* "The marquis," he says in this piece, "is nowadays the droll (*le plaisant*) of the comedy;

and as our ancestors always introduced a jester to furnish mirth for the audience, so we must have recourse to some ridiculous marquis to divert them."

It is obvious that Molière could never have maintained this independent attitude if he had not been protected by the royal favor. Indeed, Louis was constant in giving him this protection; and when, soon after this period, the character of Molière was blackened by the vilest imputations, the monarch testified his conviction of his innocence by publicly standing godfather to his child,—a tribute of respect equally honorable to the prince and the poet. The king, moreover, granted him a pension of a thousand livres annually, and to his company, which henceforth took the title of "comedians of the king," a pension of seven thousand. Our author received his pension as one of a long list of men of letters who experienced a similar bounty from the royal hand. The curious estimate exhibited in this document of the relative merits of these literary stipendiaries affords a striking evidence that the decrees of contemporaries are not unfrequently to be reversed by posterity. The obsolete Chapelain is there recorded "as the greatest French poet who has ever existed;" in consideration of which, his stipend amounted to three thousand livres, while Boileau's name, for which his satires had already secured an imperishable existence, is not even noticed! It should be added, however, on the authority of Boileau, that Chapelain himself had the principal hand in furnishing this apocryphal scale of merit to the minister.

In the month of September, 1665, Molière pro-

duced his *L'Amour Médecin,* a *comédie-ballet,* in three acts, which from the time of its conception to that of its performance consumed only five days. This piece, although displaying no more than his usual talent for caustic raillery, is remarkable as affording the earliest demonstration of those direct hostilities upon the medical faculty which he maintained at intervals during the rest of his life, and which he may be truly said to have died in maintaining. In this he followed the example of Montaigne, who, in particular, devotes one of the longest chapters in his work to a tirade against the profession, which he enforces by all the ingenuity of his wit and his usual wealth of illustration. In this, also, Molière was subsequently imitated by Le Sage, as every reader of Gil Blas will readily call to mind. Both Montaigne and Le Sage, however, like most other libellers of the healing art, were glad to have recourse to it in the hour of need. Not so with Molière. His satire seems to have been without affectation. Though an habitual valetudinarian, he relied almost wholly on the temperance of his diet for the reëstablishment of his health. "What use do you make of your physician?" said the king to him one day. "We chat together, sire," said the poet: "he gives me his prescriptions; I never follow them, and so I get well."

An ample apology for this infidelity may be found in the state of the profession at that day, whose members affected to disguise a profound ignorance of the true principles of science under a pompous exterior, which, however it might im-

pose upon the vulgar, could only bring them into deserved discredit with the better portion of the community. The physicians of that time are described as parading the streets of Paris on mules, dressed in a long robe and bands, holding their conversation in bad Latin, or, if they condescended to employ the vernacular, mixing it up with such a jargon of scholastic phrase and scientific *technics* as to render it perfectly unintelligible to vulgar ears. The following lines, cited by M. Taschereau, and written in good earnest at the time, seem to hit off most of these peculiarities:

> "Affecter un air pédantesque,
> Cracher du Grec et du Latin,
> Longue perruque, habit grotesque,
> De la fourrure et du satin,
> Tout cela réuni fait presque
> Ce qu'on appelle un médecin." *

In addition to these absurdities, the physicians of that period exposed themselves to still farther derision by the contrariety of their opinions and the animosity with which they maintained them. The famous consultation in the case of Cardinal Mazarin was well known in its day,—one of his four medical attendants affirming the seat of his disorder to be the liver, another the lungs, a third the spleen, and a fourth the mesentery. Molière's raillery, therefore, against empirics, in a profession where mistakes are so easily made, so difficult

> * A gait and air somewhat pedantic,
> And scarce to spit but Greek or Latin,
> A long peruke and habit antic,
> Sometimes of fur, sometimes of satin,
> Form the receipt by which 'tis showed
> How to make doctors *à la mode*.

to be detected, and the only one in which they are irremediable, stands abundantly excused from the censures which have been heaped upon it. Its effects were visible in the reform which in his own time it effected in their manners, if in nothing farther. They assumed the dress of men of the world, and gradually adopted the popular forms of communication; an essential step to improvement, since nothing cloaks ignorance and empiricism more effectually with the vulgar than an affected use of learned phrase and a technical vocabulary.

We are now arrived at that period of Molière's career when he composed his *Misanthrope,* a play which some critics have esteemed his masterpiece, and which all concur in admiring as one of the noblest productions of the modern drama. Its literary execution, too, of paramount importance in the eye of a French critic, is more nicely elaborated than in any other of the pieces of Molière, if we except the *Tartuffe,* and its didactic dialogue displays a maturity of thought equal to what is found in the best satires of Boileau. It is the very didactic tone of this comedy, indeed, which, combined with its want of eager, animating interest, made it less popular on its representation than some of his inferior pieces. A circumstance which occurred on the first night of its performance may be worth noticing. In the second scene of the first act, a man of fashion, it is well known, is represented as soliciting the candid opinion of *Alceste* on a sonnet of his own inditing, though he flies into a passion with him, five minutes after, for

pronouncing an unfavorable judgment. This sonnet was so artfully constructed by Molière, with those dazzling epigrammatic points most captivating to common ears, that the gratified audience were loud in their approbation of what they supposed intended in good faith by the author. How great was their mortification, then, when they heard Alceste condemn the whole as peurile, and fairly expose the false principles on which it had been constructed! such a rebuke must have carried mor weight with it than a volume of set dissertation on the principles of taste.

Rousseau has bitterly inveighed against Molière for exposing to ridicule the hero of his *Misanthrope,* a high-minded and estimable character. It was told to the Duc de Montausier, well known for his austere virtue, that he was intended as the original of the character. Much offended, he attended a representation of the piece, but, on returning, declared that " he dared hardly flatter himself the poet had intended him so great an honor." This fact, as has been well intimated by La Harpe, furnishes the best reply to Rousseau's invective.

The relations in which Molière stood with his wife at the time of the appearance of this comedy gave to the exhibition a painful interest. The levity and extravagance of this lady had for some time transcended even those liberal limits which were conceded at that day by the complaisance of a French husband, and they deeply affected the happiness of the poet. As he one day communicated the subject to his friend Chapelle, the latter

strongly urged him to confine her person,—a remedy much in vogue then for refractory wives, and one, certainly, if not more efficacious, at least more gallant than the "moderate flagellation" authorized by the English law. He remonstrated on the folly of being longer the dupe of her artifices. "Alas!" said the unfortunate poet to him, "you have never loved!" A separation, however, was at length agreed upon, and it was arranged that, while both parties occupied the same house, they should never meet except at the theatre. The respective parts which they performed in this piece corresponded precisely with their respective situations: that of *Célimène,* a fascinating, capricious coquette, insensible to every remonstrance of her lover, and selfishly bent on the gratification of her own appetites; and that of *Alceste,* perfectly sensible of the duplicity of his mistress, whom he vainly hopes to reform, and no less so of the unworthiness of his own passion, from which he as vainly hopes to extricate himself. The coincidences are too exact to be considered wholly accidental.

If Molière in his preceding pieces had hit the follies and fashionable absurdities of the age, in the *Tartuffe* he flew at still higher game, the most odious of all vices, religious hypocrisy. The result showed that his shafts were not shot in the dark. The first three acts of the *Tartuffe,* the only ones then written, made their appearance at the memorable *fêtes* known under the name of "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle," given by Louis the Fourteenth at Versailles in 1664, and of which

the inquisitive reader may find a circumstantial narrative in the twenty-fifth chapter of Voltaire's history of that monarch. The only circumstance which can give them a permanent value with posterity is their having been the occasion of the earliest exhibition of this inimitable comedy. Louis the Fourteenth, who, notwithstanding the defects of his education, seems to have had a discriminating perception of literary beauty, was fully sensible of the merits of this production. The *Tartuffes,* however, who were present at the exhibition, deeply stung by the sarcasms of the poet, like the foul birds of night whose recesses have been suddenly invaded by a glare of light, raised a fearful cry against him, until Louis even, whose solicitude for the interests of the Church was nowise impaired by his own personal derelictions, complied with their importunities for imposing a prohibition on the public performance of the play.

It was, however, privately acted in the presence of Monsieur, and afterwards of the great Condé. Copies of it were greedily circulated in the societies of Paris; and, although their unanimous suffrage was an adequate compensation to the author for the privations he incurred, it was sufficient to quicken the activity of the false zealots, who, under the mask of piety, assailed him with the grossest libels. One of them even ventured so far as to call upon the king to make a public example of him with fire and fagot; another declared that it would be an offence to the Deity to allow Molière, after such an enormity, "to participate in the sacraments, to be admitted to confession, or even

to enter the precincts of a church, considering the anathemas which it had fulminated against the authors of indecent and sacrilegious spectacles!" Soon after his sentence of prohibition, the king attended the performance of a piece entitled *Scaramouche Hermite,* a piece abounding in passages the most indelicate and profane. "What is the reason," said he, on retiring, to the Prince of Condé, "that the persons so sensibly scandalized at Molière's comedy take no umbrage at this?" "Because," said the prince, "the latter only attacks religion, while the former attacks themselves;" an answer which may remind one of a remark of Bayle in reference to the *Decameron,* which, having been placed on the Index on account of its immorality, was, however, allowed to be published in an edition which converted the names of the ecclesiastics into those of laymen; "a concession," says the philosopher, "which shows the priests to have been much more solicitous for the interests of their own order than for those of heaven."

Louis, at length convinced of the interested motives of the enemies of the *Tartuffe,* yielded to the importunities of the public and removed his prohibition of its performance. It accordingly was represented, for the first time in public, in August, 1667, before an overflowing house, extended to its full complement of five acts, but with alterations of the names of the piece, the principal personages in it, and some of its most obnoxious passages. It was entitled *The Impostor,* and its hero was styled *Panulfe.* On the second evening

of the performance, however, an interdict arrived from the president of the Parliament against the repetition of the performance, and, as the king had left Paris in order to join his army in Flanders, no immediate redress was to be obtained. It was not until two years later, 1669, that the *Tartuffe,* in its present shape, was finally allowed to proceed unmolested in its representations. It is scarcely necessary to add that these were attended with the most brilliant success which its author could have anticipated, and to which the intrinsic merits of the piece, and the unmerited persecutions he had undergone, so well entitled him. Forty-four successive representations were scarcely sufficient to satisfy the eager curiosity of the public; and his grateful company forced upon Molière a double share of the profits during every repetition of its performance for the remainder of his life. Posterity has confirmed the decision of his contemporaries, and it still remains the most admired comedy of the French theatre, and will always remain so, says a native critic, "as long as taste and hypocrites shall endure in France."

We have been thus particular in our history of these transactions, as it affords one of the most interesting examples on record of undeserved persecution with which envy and party spirit have assailed a man of letters. No one of Molière's compositions is determined by a more direct moral aim; nowhere has he stripped the mask from vice with a more intrepid hand; nowhere has he animated his discourses with a more sound and practical piety. It should be added, in justice to the

French clergy of that period, that the most eminent prelates at the court acknowledged the merits of this comedy, and were strongly in favor of its representation.

It is generally known that the amusing scene in the first act, where *Dorine* enlarges so eloquently on the good cheer which *Tartuffe* had made in the absence of his host, was suggested to Molière some years previous in Lorraine, by a circumstance which took place at the table of Louis the Fourteenth, whom Molière had accompanied in his capacity of *valet de chambre*. Perefixe, bishop of Rhodez, entering while the king was at his evening meal, during Lent, was invited by him to follow his example; but the bishop declined, on the ground that he was accustomed to eat only once during the days of vigil and fast. The king, observing one of his attendants to smile, inquired of him the reason as soon as the prelate had withdrawn. The latter informed his master that he need be under no apprehensions for the health of the good bishop, as he himself had assisted at his dinner on that day, and then recounted to him the various dishes which had been served up. The king, who listened with becoming gravity to the narration, uttered an exclamation of "Poor man!" at the specification of each new item, varying the tone of his exclamation in such a manner as to give it a highly comic effect. The humor was not lost upon our poet, who has transported the same ejaculations, with much greater effect, into the above-mentioned scene of his play. The king, who did not at first recognize the source whence

he had derived it, on being informed of it, was much pleased, if we may believe M. Taschereau, in finding himself even thus accidentally associated with the work of a man of genius.

In 1668, Molière brought forward his *Avare,* and in the following year his amusing comedy of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme,* in which the folly of unequal alliances is successfully ridiculed and exposed. This play was first represented in the presence of the court at Chambord. The king maintained during its performance an inscrutable physiognomy, which made it doubtful what might be his real sentiments respecting it. The same deportment was maintained by him during the evening towards the author, who was in attendance in his capacity of *valet de chambre.* The quick-eyed courtiers, the counts and marquises, who had so often smarted under the lash of the poet, construing this into an expression of royal disapprobation, were loud in their condemnation of him, and a certain duke boldly affirmed "that he was fast sinking into his second childhood, and that, unless some better writer soon appeared, French comedy would degenerate into mere Italian farce." The unfortunate poet, unable to catch a single ray of consolation, was greatly depressed during the interval of five days which preceded the second representation of his piece; on returning from which, the monarch assured him that "none of his productions had afforded him greater entertainment, and that, if he had delayed expressing his opinion on the preceding night, it was from the apprehension that his judgment might have been

influenced by the excellence of the acting." Whatever we may think of this exhibition of royal caprice, we must admire the suppleness of the courtiers, one and all of whom straightway expressed their full conviction of the merits of the comedy, and the duke above mentioned added, in particular, that "there was a *vis comica* in all that Molière ever wrote, to which the ancients could furnish no parallel!" What exquisite studies for his pencil must Molière not have found in this precious assembly!

We have already remarked that the profession of a comedian was but lightly esteemed in France at this period. Molière experienced the inconveniences resulting from this circumstance even after his splendid literary career had given him undoubted claims to consideration. Most of our readers, no doubt, are acquainted with the anecdote of Belloc, an agreeable poet of the court, who, on hearing one of the servants in the royal household refuse to aid the author of the *Tartuffe* in making the king's bed, courteously requested "the poet to accept his services for that purpose." Madame Campan's anecdote of a similar courtesy on the part of Louis the Fourteenth is also well known, who, when several of these functionaries refused to sit at table with the comedian, kindly invited him to sit down with him, and, calling in some of his principal courtiers, remarked that "he had requested the pleasure of Molière's company at his own table, as it was not thought quite good enough for his officers." This rebuke had the desired effect. However humiliating the reflection

may be that genius should have, at any time, stood in need of such patronage, it is highly honorable to the monarch who could raise himself so far above the prejudices of his age as to confer it.

It was the same unworthy prejudice that had so long excluded Molière from that great object and recompense of a French scholar's ambition, a seat in the Academy; a body affecting to maintain a jealous watch over the national language and literature, which the author of the *Misanthrope* and the *Tartuffe,* perhaps more than any other individual of his age, had contributed to purify and advance. Sensible of this merit, they at length offered him a place in their assembly, provided he would renounce his profession of a player and confine himself in future to his literary labors. But the poet replied to his friend Boileau, the bearer of this communication, that "too many individuals of his company depended on his theatrical labors for support to allow him for a moment to think of it;" a reply of infinitely more service to his memory than all the academic honors that could have been heaped upon him. This illustrious body, however, a century after his decease, paid him the barren compliment (the only one then in their power) of decreeing to him an *éloge,* and of admitting his bust within their walls, with this inscription upon it:

"Nothing is wanting to his glory: he was wanting to ours."

The catalogue of Academicians contemporary with Molière, most of whom now rest in sweet oblivion, or, with Cotin and Chapelain, live only

in the satires of Boileau, shows that it is as little in the power of academies to confer immortality on a writer as to deprive him of it.

We have not time to notice the excellent comedy of the *Femmes Savantes,* and some inferior pieces, written by our author at a later period of his life, and must hasten to the closing scene. He had been long affected by a pulmonary complaint, and it was only by severe temperance, as we have before stated, that he was enabled to preserve even a moderate degree of health. At the commencement of the year 1673 his malady sensibly increased. At this very season he composed his *Malade Imaginaire,*—the most whimsical, and perhaps the most amusing, of the compositions in which he has indulged his raillery against the faculty. On the seventeenth of February, being the day appointed for its fourth representation, his friends would have dissuaded him from appearing, in consequence of his increasing indisposition; but he persisted in his design, alleging "that more than fifty poor individuals depended for their daily bread on its performance." His life fell a sacrifice to his benevolence. The exertions which he was compelled to make in playing the principal part of *Argan* aggravated his distemper, and as he was repeating the word *juro* in the concluding ceremony he fell into a convulsion, which he vainly endeavored to disguise from the spectators under a forced smile. He was immediately carried to his house in the Rue de Richelieu, now No. 34. A violent fit of coughing, on his arrival, occasioned the rupture of a blood-vessel; and, seeing his end

approaching, he sent for two ecclesiastics of the parish of St. Eustace, to which he belonged, to administer to him the last offices of religion. But these worthy persons refused their assistance; and before a third, who had been sent for, could arrive, Molière, suffocated with the effusion of blood, had expired in the arms of his family.

Harlay de Champvalon, at that time Archbishop of Paris, refused the rites of sepulture to the deceased poet because he was a comedian and had had the misfortune to die without receiving the sacraments. This prelate is conspicuous, even in the chronicles of that period, for his bold and infamous debaucheries. It is of him that Madame de Sévigné observes, in one of her letters, "There are two little inconveniences which make it difficult for any one to undertake his funeral oration,—his life and his death." Father Gaillard, who at length consented to undertake it, did so on the condition that he should not be required to say any thing of the character of the deceased. The remonstrance of Louis the Fourteenth having induced this person to remove his interdict, he privately instructed the curate of St. Eustace not to allow the usual service for the dead to be recited at the interment. On the day appointed for this ceremony, a number of the rabble assembled before the deceased poet's door, determined to oppose it. "They knew only," says Voltaire, "that Molière was a comedian, but did not know that he was a philosopher and a great man." They had, more probably, been collected together by the Tartuffes, his unforgiving enemies. The widow of the poet

appeased these wretches by throwing money to them from the windows. In the evening, the body, escorted by a procession of about a hundred individuals, the friends and intimate acquaintances of the deceased poet, each of them bearing a flambeau in his hand, was quietly deposited in the cemetery of St. Joseph, without the ordinary chant, or service of any kind. It was not thus that Paris followed to the tomb the remains of her late distinguished comedian, Talma. Yet Talma was only a comedian, while Molière, in addition to this, had the merit of being the most eminent comic writer whom France had ever produced. The different degree of popular civilization which this difference of conduct indicates may afford a subject of contemplation by no means unpleasing to the philanthropist.

In the year 1792, during that memorable period in France when an affectation of reverence for their illustrious dead was strangely mingled with the persecution of the living, the Parisians resolved to exhume the remains of La Fontaine and Molière, in order to transport them to a more honorable place of interment. Of the relics thus obtained, it is certain that no portion belonged to La Fontaine, and it is extremely probable that none did to Molière. Whosesoever they may have been, they did not receive the honors for which their repose had been disturbed. With the usual fickleness of the period, they were shamefully transferred from one place to another, or abandoned to neglect, for seven years, when the patriotic conservator of the *Monumens Français* suc-

ceeded in obtaining them for his collection at the *Petits Augustins*. On the suppression of this institution in 1817, the supposed ashes of the two poets were, for the last time, transported to the spacious cemetery of Père de la Chaise, where the tomb of the author of the *Tartuffe* is designated by an inscription in Latin, which, as if to complete the scandal of the proceedings, is grossly mistaken in the only fact which it pretends to record, namely, the age of the poet at the time of his decease.

Molière died soon after entering upon his fifty-second year. He is represented to have been somewhat above the middle stature, and well proportioned; his features large, his complexion dark, and his black, bushy eyebrows so flexible as to admit of his giving an infinitely comic expression to his physiognomy. He was the best actor of his own generation, and, by his counsels, formed the celebrated Baron, the best of the succeeding. He played all the range of his own characters, from *Alceste* to *Sganarelle*, though he seems to have been peculiarly fitted for broad comedy. He composed with rapidity, for which Boileau has happily complimented him:

> "Rare et sublime esprit, dont la fertile veine
> Ignore en écrivant le travail et la peine;"

unlike in this to Boileau himself, and to Racine, the former of whom taught the latter, if we may credit his son, "the art of rhyming with difficulty." Of course, the verses of Molière have neither the correctness nor the high finish of those of his two illustrious rivals.

He produced all his pieces, amounting to thirty, in the short space of fifteen years. He was in the habit of reading these to an old female domestic by the name of La Forêt, on whose unsophisticated judgment he greatly relied. On one occasion, when he attempted to impose upon her the production of a brother author, she plainly told him that he had never written it. Sir Walter Scott may have had this habit of Molière's in his mind when he introduced a similar expedient into his "Chronicles of the Canongate." For the same reason, our poet used to request the comedians to bring their children with them when he recited a new play. The peculiar advantage of this humble criticism in dramatic compositions is obvious. Alfieri himself, as he informs us, did not disdain to resort to it.

Molière's income was very ample, probably not less than twenty-five or thirty thousand francs,—an immense sum for that day; yet he left but little property. The expensive habits of his wife and his own liberality may account for it. One example of this is worth recording, as having been singularly opportune and well directed. When Racine came up to Paris as a young adventurer, he presented to Molière a copy of his first crude tragedy, long since buried in oblivion. The latter discerned in it, amid all its imperfections, the latent spark of dramatic genius, and he encouraged its author by the present of a hundred louis. This was doing better for him than Corneille did, who advised the future author of *Phèdre* to abandon the tragic walk and to devote himself altogether

to comedy. Racine recompensed this benefaction of his friend, at a later period of his life, by quarrelling with him.

Molière was naturally of a reserved and taciturn temper, insomuch that his friend Boileau used to call him the *Contemplateur*. Strangers who had expected to recognize in his conversation the sallies of wit which distinguished his dramas went away disappointed. The same thing is related of La Fontaine. The truth is, that Molière went into society as a spectator, not as an actor; he found there the studies for the characters which he was to transport upon the stage, and he occupied himself with observing them. The dreamer La Fontaine lived, too, in a world of his own creation. His friend Madame de la Sablière paid to him this untranslatable compliment: "En vérité, mon cher La Fontaine, vous seriez bien bête, si vous n'aviez pas tant d'esprit." These unseasonable reveries brought him, it may be imagined, into many whimsical adventures. The great Corneille, too, was distinguished by the same apathy. A gentleman dined at the same table with him for six months without suspecting the author of the "Cid."

The literary reputation of Molière, and his amiable personal endowments, naturally led him into an intimacy with the most eminent wits of the golden age in which he lived, but especially with Boileau, La Fontaine, and Racine; and the confidential intercourse of these great minds, and their frequent *réunions* for the purposes of social pleasure, bring to mind the similar associations

at the Mermaid's, Will's Coffee-house, and Button's, which form so pleasing a picture in the annals of English literature. It was common on these occasions to have a volume of the unfortunate Chapelain's epic, then in popular repute, lie open upon the table, and if one of the party fell into a grammatical blunder, to impose upon him the reading of some fifteen or twenty verses of it: "a whole page," says Louis Racine, "was sentence of death." La Fontaine, in his *Psyché,* has painted his reminiscences of these happy meetings in the coloring of fond regret; where, "freely discussing such topics of general literature or personal gossip as might arise, they touched lightly upon all, like bees passing on from flower to flower, criticising the works of others without envy, and of one another, when any one chanced to fall into the malady of the age, with frankness." Alas that so rare a union of minds, destined to live together through all ages, should have been dissolved by the petty jealousies incident to common men!

In these assemblies frequent mention is made of Chapelle, the most intimate friend of Molière, whose agreeable verses are read with pleasure in our day, and whose cordial manners and sprightly conversation made him the delight of his own. His mercurial spirits, however, led him into too free an indulgence of convivial pleasures, and brought upon him the repeated though unavailing remonstrances of his friends. On one of these occasions, as Boileau was urging upon him the impropriety of this indulgence, and its inevitable consequences, Chapelle, who received the admoni-

tion with great contrition, invited his Mentor to withdraw from the public street in which they were then walking into a neighboring house, where they could talk over the matter with less interruption. Here wine was called for, and, in the warmth of discussion, a second bottle being soon followed by a third, both parties at length found themselves in a condition which made it advisable to adjourn the lecture to a more fitting occasion.

Molière enjoyed also the closest intimacy with the great Condé, the most distinguished ornament of the court of Louis the Fourteenth; to such an extent, indeed, that the latter directed that the poet should never be refused admission to him, at whatever hour he might choose to pay his visit. His regard for his friend was testified by his remark, rather more candid than courteous, to an abbé of his acquaintance, who had brought him an epitaph of his own writing upon the deceased poet. "Would to Heaven," said the prince, "that he were in a condition to bring me yours!"

We have already wandered beyond the limits which we had assigned to ourselves for an abstract of Molière's literary labors and of the most interesting anecdotes in his biography. Without entering, therefore, into a criticism on his writings, of which the public stand in no need, we shall dismiss the subject with a few brief reflections on their probable influence, and on the design of the author in producing them.

The most distinguished French critics, with the overweening partiality in favor of their own nation, so natural and so universal, placing Mo-

lière by common consent at the head of their own comic writers, have also claimed for him a pre-eminence over those of every other age and country. A. W. Schlegel, a very competent judge in these matters, has degraded him, on the other hand, from the walks of high comedy to the writer of "buffoon farces, for which his genius and inclination seem to have essentially fitted him;" adding, moreover, that "his characters are not drawn from nature, but from the fleeting and superficial forms of fashionable life." This is a hard sentence, accommodated to the more forcible illustration of the peculiar theory which the German writer has avowed throughout his work, and which, however reasonable in its first principles, has led him into as exaggerated an admiration of the romantic models which he prefers, as disparagement of the classical school which he detests. It is a sentence, moreover, upon which some eminent critics in his own country, who support his theory in the main, have taken the liberty to demur.

That a large proportion of Molière's pieces are conceived in a vein of broad, homely merriment, rather than in that of elevated comedy, abounding in forced situations, high caricature, and practical jokes; in the knavish, intriguing valets of Plautus and Terence; in a compound of that good nature and irritability, shrewdness and credulity, which make up the dupes of Aristophanes, is very true; but that a writer distinguished by his deep reflection, his pure taste, and nice observation of character should have preferred this to the higher walks of his art, is absolutely incredible. He has

furnished the best justification of himself in an apology which a contemporary biographer reports him to have made to some one who censured him on this very ground. "If I wrote simply for fame," said he, "I should manage very differently; but I write for the support of my company. I must not address myself, therefore, to a few people of education, but to the mob. And this latter class of gentry take very little interest in a continued elevation of style and sentiment." With all these imperfections and lively absurdities, however, there is scarcely one of Molière's minor pieces which does not present us with traits of character that come home to every heart, and felicities of expression that, from their truth, have come to be proverbial.

With regard to the objection that his characters are not so much drawn from nature as from the local manners of the age, if it be meant that they are not acted upon by those deep passions which engross the whole soul, and which, from this intensity, have more of a tragic than a comic import in them, but are rather drawn from the foibles and follies of ordinary life, it is true; but then these last are likely to be quite as permanent, and, among civilized nations, quite as universal, as the former. And who has exposed them with greater freedom or with a more potent ridicule than Molière? Love, under all its thousand circumstances, its quarrels and reconciliations; vanity, humbly suing for admiration under the guise of modesty; whimsical contradictions of profession and habitual practice; the industry with which the lower

classes ape, not the virtues, but the follies of their superiors; the affectation of fashion, taste, science, or any thing but what the party actually possesses; the *esprit de corps,* which leads us to feel an exalted respect for our own profession and a sovereign contempt for every other; the friendly adviser, who has an eye to his own interest; the author, who seeks your candid opinion, and quarrels with you when you have given it; the fair friend, who kindly sacrifices your reputation for a jest; the hypocrite under every aspect, who deceives the world or himself,—these form the various and motley panorama of character which Molière has transferred to his canvas, and which, though mostly drawn from cultivated life, must endure as long as society shall hold together.

Indeed, Molière seems to have possessed all the essential requisites for excelling in genteel comedy: a pure taste, an acute perception of the ridiculous, the tone of elegant dialogue, and a wit brilliant and untiring as Congreve's, but which, instead of wasting itself, like his, in idle flashes of merriment, is uniformly directed with a moral or philosophical aim. This obvious didactic purpose, in truth, has been censured as inconsistent with the spirit of the drama, and as belonging rather to satire; but it secured to him an influence over the literature and the opinions of his own generation which has been possessed by no other comic writer of the moderns.

He was the first to recall his countrymen from the vapid hyperbole and puerile conceits of the ancient farces, and to instruct them in the maxim

which Boileau has since condensed into a memorable verse, that "nothing is beautiful but what is natural." We have already spoken of the reformation which one of his early pieces effected in the admirers of the Hôtel de Rambouillet and its absurdities; and when this confederacy afterwards rallied under an affectation of science, as it had before done of letters, he again broke it with his admirable satire of the *Femmes Savantes*. We do not recollect any similar revolution effected by a single effort of genius, unless it be that brought about by the *Baviad* and *Mæviad*. But Mr. Gifford, in the Della-Cruscan school,* but "broke a butterfly upon the wheel," in comparison with those enemies, formidable by rank and talent, whom Molière assailed. We have noticed in its proper place the influence which his writings had in compelling the medical faculty of his day to lay aside the affected deportment, technical jargon, and other mummeries then in vogue, by means of the public derision to which he had deservedly exposed them. In the same manner, he so successfully ridiculed the miserable dialectics, pedantry, and intolerance of the schoolmen, in his diverting dialogues between *Dr. Marphurius*

* The term "Della Crusca" was originally applied to an academy or society established in Florence, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, to purify the Italian language of its impurities. The same name was given two hundred years later to a brotherhood of poets in England whose leader was Mrs. Piozzi, Dr. Johnson's friend. The English Della Cruscans were remarkable mainly for their affectation and for their fondness for high-flown penagyrics. Willian Gifford crushed them in his Baviad, 1794, and Mæviad, 1796. His names were suggested by Vergil, Eclogue iii. 90, 91.

Qui Bavium non odit, amet tua carmina, Maevi:
Atque idem jungat vulpes, et mulgeat hircos.—M.

and *Dr. Pancrace,* that he is said to have completely defeated the serious efforts of the University for obtaining a confirmation of the decree of 1624, which had actually prohibited, *under pain of death,* the promulgation of any opinion contrary to the doctrines of Aristotle. The *arrêt burlesque* of his friend Boileau, at a later period, if we may trust the *Menagiana,* had a principal share in preventing a decree of the Parliament against the philosophy of Descartes. It is difficult to estimate the influence of our poet's satire on the state of society in general, and on those higher ranks in particular whose affectations and pretensions he assailed with such pertinacious hostility. If he did not reform them, he at least deprived them of their fascination and much of their mischievous influence, by holding them up to the contempt and laughter of the public. Sometimes, it must be admitted, though very rarely, in effecting this object he so far transgressed the bounds of decorum as to descend even to personalities.

From this view of the didactic purpose proposed by Molière in his comedies, it is obviously difficult to institute a comparison between them and those of our English dramatists, or, rather, of Shakspeare, who may be taken as their representative. The latter seems to have had no higher end in view than mere amusement: he took a leaf out of the great volume of human nature as he might find it; nor did he accommodate it to the illustration of any moral or literary theorem. The former, on the other hand, manifests such a direct perceptive purpose as to give to some of his pieces

the appearance of satires rather than of comedies; argument takes the place of action, and the *pro* and *con* of the matter are discussed with all the formality of a school exercise. This essentially diminishes the interest of some of his best plays, the *Misanthrope* and the *Femmes Savantes* for example, which for this reason seem better fitted for the closet than the stage, and have long since ceased to be favorites with the public. This want of interest is, moreover, aggravated by the barrenness of action visible in many of Molière's comedies, where he seems only to have sought an apology for bringing together his *coteries* of gentlemen and ladies for the purpose of exhibiting their gladiatorial dexterity in conversation. Not so with the English dramatist, whose boundless invention crowds his scene with incidents that hurry us along with breathless interest, but which sadly scandalize the lover of the unities.

In conformity with his general plan, too, Shakspeare brings before us every variety of situation, —the court, the camp, and the cloister; the busy hum of populous cities, or the wild solitude of the forest,—presenting us with pictures of rich and romantic beauty which could not fall within the scope of his rival, and allowing himself to indulge in the unbounded revelry of an imagination which Molière did not possess. The latter, on the other hand, an attentive observer of man as he is found in an over-refined state of society, in courts and crowded capitals, copied his minutest lineaments with a precision that gives to his most general sketches the air almost of personal portraits;

seasoning, moreover, his discourses with shrewd hints and maxims of worldly policy. Shakspeare's genius led him rather to deal in bold touches than in this nice delineation. He describes classes rather than individuals; he touches the springs of the most intense passions. The daring of ambition, the craving of revenge, the deep tenderness of love, are all materials in his hands for comedy; and this gives to some of his admired pieces—his "Merchant of Venice" and his "Measure for Measure," for example—a solemnity of coloring that leaves them only to be distinguished from tragedy by their more fortunate termination. Molière, on the contrary, sedulously excludes from his plays whatever can impair their comic interest. And when, as he has done very rarely, he aims directly at vice instead of folly (in the *Tartuffe,* for instance), he studies to exhibit it under such ludicrous points of view as shall excite the derision rather than the indignation of his audience.

But, whatever be the comparative merits of these great masters, each must be allowed to have attained complete success in his way. Comedy, in the hands of Shakspeare, exhibits to us man, not only as he is moved by the petty vanities of life, but by deep and tumultuous passion; in situations which it requires all the invention of the poet to devise and the richest coloring of eloquence to depict. But if the object of comedy, as has been said, be "to correct the follies of the age, by exposing them to ridicule," who then has equalled Molière?

ITALIAN NARRATIVE POETRY *

(October, 1824)

THE characteristics of an Italian school are nowhere so discernible in English literary history as under the reign of Elizabeth. At the period when England was most strenuous in breaking off her spiritual relations with Italy, she cultivated most closely her intellectual. It is hardly necessary to name either the contemporary dramatists, or Surrey, Sidney, and Spenser, the former of whom derived the plots of many of their most popular plays, as the latter did the forms, and frequently the spirit, of their poetical compositions, from Italian models. The translations of the same period were, in several instances, superior to any which have been since produced. Harrington's version of the "Orlando Furioso," with all its inaccuracy, is far superior to the cumbrous monotony of Hoole. Of Fairfax, the elegant translator of Tasso, it is enough to say that he is styled by Dryden "the poetical father of Waller," and quoted by him, in conjunction with Spenser, as "one of the great masters in our language."

* 1. "The Orlando Innamorato; translated into prose and verse, from the Italian of Francesco Berni. By W. S. Rose." 8vo, pp. 279. London, 1823.

2. "The Orlando Furioso; translated into verse from the Italian of Ludovico Ariosto. By W. S. Rose." Vol. i. 8vo. London, 1823.

The popularity of the Italian was so great even in Ascham's day, who did not survive the first half of Elizabeth's reign, as to draw from the learned schoolmaster much peevish animadversion upon what he terms "the enchantments of Circe, fond books of late translated out of Italian into English, and sold in every shop in London." It gradually lost this wide authority during the succeeding century. This was but natural. Before the time of Elizabeth, all the light of learning which fell upon the world had come from Italy, and our own literature, like a young and tender plant, insensibly put forth its branches most luxuriantly in the direction whence it felt this invigorating influence. As it grew in years and hardihood, it sent its fibres deeper into its own soil, and drew thence the nourishment which enabled it to assume its fair and full proportions. Milton, it is true, the brightest name on the poetical records of that period, cultivated it with eminent success. Any one acquainted with the writings of Dante, Pulci, and Tasso will understand the value and extent of Milton's obligations to the Italian. He was far from desiring to conceal them, and he has paid many a tribute "of melodious verse" to the sources from which he drew so much of the nourishment of his exalted genius. "To imitate, as he has done," in the language of Boileau, "is not to act the part of a plagiary, but of a rival." Milton is, moreover, one of the few writers who have succeeded so far in comprehending the niceties of foreign tongue as to be able to add something to its poetical wealth, and his Italian sonnets

are written with such purity as to have obtained commendations from the Tuscan critics.*

Boileau, who set the current of French taste at this period, had a considerable contempt for that of his neighbors. He pointed one of his antithetical couplets at the "tinsel of Tasso" ("*clinquant du Tasse*"†), and in another he ridiculed the idea of epics in which "the devil was always blustering against the heavens." ‡ The English admitted the sarcasm of Boileau with the cold commentary of Addison;§ and the "clinquant du Tasse" became a cant term of reproach upon the whole body of Italian letters. The French went still farther, and afterwards, applying the sarcasm of their critic to Milton as well as to Tasso, rejected both the poets upon the same principles. The French did the English as much justice as they did the Italians. No great change of opinion in this matter took place in England during the last century. The Wartons and Gray had a just estimation of this beautiful tongue, but Dr. Johnson, the dominant critic of that day, seems to have understood the language but imperfectly, and not to have much relished in it what he understood.

In the present age of intellectual activity, atten-

* Milton, in his treatise on *The Reason of Church Government* alludes modestly enough to his Italian pieces and the commendations bestowed upon them: "Other things, which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniencies to hatch up among them, were received with written encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps."

† Satire IX.

‡ L'Art poétique, c. iii.

§ Spectator, No. VI.

tion is so generally bestowed on all modern languages which are ennobled by a literature, that it is not singular an acquaintance with the Italian in particular should be widely diffused. Great praise, however, is due to the labors of Mr. Roscoe. There can be little doubt that his elaborate biographies of the Medici, which contain as much literary criticism as historical narrative, have mainly contributed to the promotion of these studies among his countrymen. These works have of late met with much flippant criticism in some of their leading journals. In Italy they have been translated, are now cited as authorities, and have received the most encomiastic notices from several eminent scholars. These facts afford conclusive testimony of their merits. The name of Mathias is well known to every lover of the Italian tongue; his poetical productions rank with those of Milton in merit, and far exceed them in quantity. To conclude, it is not many years since Cary gave to his countrymen his very extraordinary version of the father of Tuscan poetry, and Rose is now swelling the catalogue with translations of the two most distinguished chivalrous epics of Italy.

Epic romance has continued to be a great favorite in that country ever since its first introduction into the polished circles of Florence and Ferrara, towards the close of the fifteenth century. It has held much the same rank in its ornamental literature which the drama once enjoyed in the English, and which historical novel-writing maintains now. It hardly seems credible that an enlightened peo-

ple should long continue to take great satisfaction in poems founded on the same extravagant actions, and spun out to the appalling length of twenty, thirty, nay, forty cantos of a thousand verses each. But the Italians, like most Southern nations, delight exceedingly in the uncontrolled play of the imagination, and they abandon themselves to all its brilliant illusions, with no other object in view than mere recreation. An Englishman looks for a moral, or, at least, for some sort of instruction, from the wildest work of fiction. But an Italian goes to it as he would go to the opera,—to get impressions rather than ideas. He is extremely sensible to the fine tones of his native language, and, under the combined influence produced by the coloring of a lavish fancy and the music of a voluptuous versification, he seldom stoops to a cold analysis of its purpose or its probability.

Romantic fiction, however, which flourished so exuberantly under a warm Southern sky, was transplanted from the colder regions of Normandy and England. It is remarkable that both these countries, in which it had its origin, should have ceased to cultivate it at the very period when the perfection of their respective languages would have enabled them to do so with entire success. We believe this remark requires no qualification in regard to France. Spenser affords one illustrious exception among the English.*

* The *influence*, however, of the old Norman romances may be discovered in the productions of a much later period. Their incredible length required them to be broken up into *fyttes*, or cantos,

It was not until long after the extinction of this species of writing in the North that it reappeared in Italy. The commercial habits and the republican institutions of the Italians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were most unfavorable to the spirit of chivalry, and, consequently, to the fables which grew out of it. The three patriarchs of their literature, moreover, by the light which, in this dark period, they threw over other walks of imagination, turned the attention of their countrymen from those of romance. Dante, indeed, who resembled Milton in so many other particulars, showed a similar predilection for the ancient tales of chivalry. His *Commedia* contains several encomiastic allusions to them; but, like the English bard, he contented himself with these, and chose a subject better suited to his ambitious genius and inflexible temper.* His poem, it is true, was

by the minstrel, who recited them with the accompaniment of a harp, in the same manner as the epics of Homer, broken into *rhapsodies*, were chanted by the bards of Ionia. The minstrel who could thus beguile the tedium of a winter's evening was a welcome guest at the baronial castle and in the hall of the monastery. As Greek and Roman letters were revived, the legends of chivalry fell into disrepute, and the minstrel gradually retreated to the cottage of the peasant, who was still rude enough to relish his simple melody. But the long romance was beyond the comprehension or the taste of the rustic. It therefore gave way to less complicated narratives, and from its wreck may be fairly said to have arisen those Border songs and ballads which form the most beautiful collection of rural minstrelsy that belongs to any age or country.

* Milton's poetry abounds in references to the subjects of romantic fable; and in his "*Epitaphium Damonis*" he plainly intimates his intention of writing an epic on the story of Arthur. It may be doubted whether he would have succeeded on such a topic. His austere character would seem to have been better fitted to feel the impulses of religious enthusiasm than those of chivalry; and England has no reason to regret that her most sublime poet was reserved

of too eccentric a character to be widely imitated,* and both Boccaccio and Petrarch, with less talent, had a more extensive influence over the taste of their nation. The garrulous graces of the former and the lyrical finish of the latter are still solicited in the lighter compositions of Italy. Lastly, the discoveries of ancient manuscripts at home, and the introduction of others from Constantinople, when that rich depository of Grecian science fell into the hands of the barbarian, gave a new direction to the intellectual enterprise of Italian scholars, and withdrew them almost wholly from the farther cultivation of their infant literature.

Owing to these circumstances, the introduction of the chivalrous epopee was protracted to the close of the fifteenth century, when its first successful specimens were produced at the accomplished court of the Medici. The encouragement extended by this illustrious family to every branch of intellectual culture has been too often the subject of encomium to require from us any particular animadversion. Lorenzo, especially, by uniting in his own person the scholarship and talent which he so liberally rewarded in others, contrib-

for the age of Cromwell instead of the romantic reign of Elizabeth.

* The best imitation of the *Divina Commedia*" is probably the "*Cantiba in morte di Ugo Basville*," by the most eminent of the living Italian poets, Monti. His talent for vigorous delineation by a single *coup de pinceau* is eminently *Dantesque*, and the plan of his poem is the exact counterpart of that of the "*Inferno*." Instead of a mortal descending into the regions of the damned, one of their number (the spirit of Basville, a Frenchman) is summoned back to the earth, to behold the crimes and miseries of his native country during the period of the Revolution.

uted more than all to the effectual promotion of an enlightened taste among his countrymen. Even his amusements were subservient to it, and the national literature may be fairly said at this day to retain somewhat of the character communicated to it by his elegant recreations. His delicious villas at Fiesole and Cajano are celebrated by the scholars who, in the silence of their shades, pursued with him the studies of his favorite philosophy and of poetry. Even the sensual pleasures of the banquet were relieved by the inventions of wit and fancy. Lyrical composition, which, notwithstanding its peculiar adaptation to the flexible movements of the Italian tongue, had fallen into neglect, was revived, and, together with the first eloquent productions of the romantic muse, was recited at the table of Lorenzo.

Of the guests who frequented it, Pulci and Politian are the names most distinguished, and the only ones connected with our present subject. The latter of these was received into the family of Lorenzo as the preceptor of his children,—an office for which he seems to have been better qualified by his extraordinary attainments than by his disposition. Whatever may have been the asperity of his temper, however, his poetical compositions breathe the perfect spirit of harmony. The most remarkable of these, distinguished as the "Verses of Politian" (*Stanze di Poliziano*), is a brief fragment of an epic whose purpose was to celebrate the achievements of Julian de' Medici, a younger brother of Lorenzo, at a tournament exhibited at Florence in 1468. This would appear

but a meagre basis for the structure of a great poem. Politian, however, probably in consequence of the untimely death of Julian, his hero, abandoned it in the middle of the second canto, even before he had reached the event which was to constitute the subject of his story.

The incidents of the poem thus abruptly terminated are of no great account. We have a portrait of Julian, a hunting-expedition, a love-adventure, a digression into the island of Venus, which takes up about half the canto, and a vision of the hero, which ends just as the tournament, the subject of the piece, is about to begin, and with it, like the "fabric of a vision," ends the poem also. In this short space, however, the poet has concentrated all the beauties of his art, the melody of a musical ear, and the inventions of a plastic fancy. His island of love, in particular, is emblazoned with those gorgeous splendors which have since been borrowed for the enchanted gardens of Alcina, Armida, and Acrasia.

But this little fragment is not recommended, at least to an English reader, so much by its Oriental pomp of imagery as by its more quiet and delicate pictures of external nature. Brilliancy of imagination is the birthright of the Italian poet, as much as a sober, contemplative vein is of the English. This is the characteristic of almost all their best and most popular poetry during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The two great poets of the fourteenth approach much nearer to the English character. Dante shows not only deeper reflection than is common with his countrymen, but in parts

of his work, in the *Purgatorio* more especially, manifests a sincere relish for natural beauty, by his most accurate pictures of rural objects and scenery. Petrarch cherished the recollections of an unfortunate passion until, we may say, without any mystical perversion of language, it became a part of his intellectual existence.* This gave a tender and melancholy expression to his poems, more particularly to those written after the death of Laura, quite as much English as Italian. Love furnishes the great theme and impulse to the

* Whatever may be thought of the speculations of the Abbé de Sade, no doubt can be entertained of the substantial existence of Laura, or of Petrarch's passion for her. Indeed, independently of the internal evidence afforded by his poetry, such direct notices of his mistress are scattered through his "Letters" and serious prose compositions that it is singular there should ever have existed a skepticism on these points. Ugo Foscolo, the well-known author of *Jacopo Ortis*, has lately published an octavo volume, entitled "Essays on Petrarch." Among other particulars showing the unbounded influence that Laura de Sade obtained over the mind of her poetical lover, he quotes the following memorandum, made by Petrarch two months after her decease, in his private manuscript copy of Virgil, now preserved in the Ambrosian Library at Milan:

"It was in the early days of my youth, on the sixth of April, in the morning, and in the year 1327, that Laura, distinguished by her own virtues, and celebrated in my verses, first blessed my eyes, in the Church of Santa Clara, at Avignon; and it was in the same city, on the sixth of the very same month of April, at the very same hour in the morning, in the year 1348, that this bright luminary was withdrawn from our sight, when I was at Verona, alas! ignorant of my calamity. The remains of her chaste and beautiful body were deposited in the Church of the Cordeliers on the evening of the same day. To preserve the afflicting remembrance, I have taken a bitter pleasure in recording it, particularly in this book, which is most frequently before my eyes, in order that nothing in this world may have any farther attraction for me; that, this great attachment to life being dissolved, I may, by frequent reflection, and a proper estimation of our transitory existence, be admonished that it is high time for me to think of quitting this earthly Babylon, which I trust it will not be difficult for me, with a strong and manly courage, to accomplish."—Page 35.

Italian poet. It is not too much to say that all their principal versifiers have written under the inspiration of a real or pretended passion. It is to them what a less showy and less exclusive sensibility is to an Englishman. The latter acknowledges the influence of many other affections and relations in life. The death of a friend is far more likely to excite his muse than the smiles or frowns of his mistress. The Italian seldom dwells on melancholy reminiscences, but writes under the impulse of a living and ardent passion. Petrarch did both; but in the poetry which he composed after the death of his mistress, exalted as it is by devotional sentiment, he deviated from the customs of his nation, and adopted an English tone of feeling. A graver spirit of reflection and a deeper sympathy for the unobtrusive beauties of nature are observable in some of their later writers; but these are not primitive elements in the Italian character. Gay, brilliant, imaginative, are the epithets which best indicate the character of their literature during its most flourishing periods; and the poetry of Italy seems to reflect as clearly her unclouded skies and glowing landscape as that of England does the tranquil and somewhat melancholy complexion of her climate.

The verses of Politian, to return from our digression, contain many descriptions distinguished by the calm, moral beauty of which we have been speaking. Resemblances may be traced between these passages and the writings of some of our best English poets. The descriptive poetry of Gray and of Goldsmith, particularly, exhibits a

remarkable coincidence with that of Politian in the enumeration of rural images. The stanza cxxi., setting forth the descent of Cupid into the island of Venus, may be cited as having suggested a much-admired simile in Gay's popular ballad, "Black-eyed Susan," since the English verse is almost a metaphrase of the Italian:

"Or poi che ad all tese ivi pervenne,
Forte le scosse, e giù calossi a piombo,
Tutto serrato nelle sacre penne,
Come a suo nido fa lieto colombo."

"So the sweet lark, high poised in air,
Shuts close his pinions to his breast,
If chance his mate's shrill call he hear,
And drops at once into her nest."

These "Stanze" were the first example of a happy cultivation of Italian verse in the fifteenth century. The scholars of that day composed altogether in Latin. Politian, as he grew older, disdained this abortive production of his youthful muse, and relied for his character with posterity on his Latin poems and his elaborate commentaries upon the ancient classics. Petrarch looked for immortality to his "Africa," as did Boccaccio to his learned Latin disquisition upon ancient mythology.* Could they now, after the lapse of more than four centuries, revisit the world, how would they be astonished, perhaps mortified, the

*"De Genealogia Deorum."—The Latin writings of Boccaccio and Petrarch may be considered the foundation of their fame with their contemporaries. The coronation of the latter in the Roman capitol was a homage paid rather to his achievements in an ancient tongue than to any in his own. He does not even notice his Italian lyrics in his "Letters to Posterity."

former to find that he was remembered only as the sonneteer, and the latter as the novelist! The Latin prose of Politian may be consulted by an antiquary; his Latin poetry must be admired by scholars of taste; but his few Italian verses constitute the basis of his high reputation at this day with the great body of his countrymen. He wrote several lyrical pieces, and a short pastoral drama (*Orfèo*), the first of a species which afterwards grew into such repute under the hands of Tasso and Guarini. All of these bear the same print of his genius. One cannot but regret that so rare a mind should, in conformity with the perverse taste of his age, have abandoned the freshness of a living tongue for the ungrateful culture of a dead one. His "Stanze," the mere prologue of an epic, still survive amid the complete and elaborate productions of succeeding poets; they may be compared to the graceful portico of some unfinished temple, which time and taste have respected, and which remains as in the days of its architect, a beautiful ruin.

Luigi Pulci, the other eminent poet whom we mentioned as a frequent guest at the table of Lorenzo de' Medici, was of a noble family, and the youngest of three brothers, all of them even more distinguished by their accomplishments than by birth. There seems to be nothing worthy of particular record in his private history. He is said to have possessed a frank and merry disposition, and, to judge from his great poem, as well as from some lighter pieces of burlesque satire, which he bandied with one of his friends whom he

was in the habit of meeting at the house of Lorenzo, he was not particularly fastidious in his humor. His *Morgante Maggiore* is reported to have been written at the request of Lorenzo's mother, and recited at his table. It is a genuine epic of chivalry, containing twenty-eight cantos, founded on the traditionary defeat—the " dolorosa rotta "—of Charlemagne and his peers in the Valley of Roncesvalles. It adheres much more closely than any of the other Italian romances to the lying chronicle of Turpin.

It may appear singular that the intention of the author should not become apparent in the course of eight-and-twenty cantos, but it is a fact that scholars both at home and abroad have long disputed whether the poem is serious or satirical. Crescimbeni styles the author " modesto e moderato," while Tiraboschi expressly charges him with the deliberate design of ridiculing Scripture, and Voltaire, in his preface, cites the Morgante as an apology for his profligate " Pucelle." It cannot be denied that the story abounds in such ridiculous eccentricities as give it the air of a parody upon the marvels of romance. The hero, Morgante, is a converted infidel, " un gigante smisurato," whose formidable weapon is a bell-clapper, and who, after running through some twenty cantos of gigantic valor and mountebank extravagance, is brought to an untimely end by a wound in the heel, not from a Trojan arrow, but from the bite of a crab! We doubt, however, whether Pulci intended his satirical shafts for the Christian faith. Liberal allowance is to be conceded for the fashion

of his age. Nothing is more frequent in the productions of that period than such irreverent freedoms with the most sacred topics as would be quite shocking in ours. Such freedoms, however, cannot reasonably be imputed to profanity, or even levity, since numerous instances of them occur in works of professed moral tendency, as in the mysteries and moralities, for example, those solemn deformities of the ancient French and English drama. The chronicle of Turpin, the basis of Pulci's epic, which, though a fraud, was a pious one, invented by some priest to celebrate the triumphs of the Christian arms, is tainted with the same indecent familiarities.*

Tempora mutantur. In a scandalous pasquinade published by Lord Byron in the first number of his Liberal, there is a verse describing St. Peter officiating as the door-keeper of heaven. Pulci has a similar one in the Morgante (canto xxvi., st. 91), which, no doubt, furnished the hint to his lordship, who has often improved upon the Italian poets. Both authors describe St. Peter's dress and vocation with the most whimsical minuteness. In the Italian, the passage, introduced into the midst of a solemn, elaborate description, has all the appearance of being told in very good faith.

* This spurious document of the twelfth century contains, in a copy which we have now before us, less than sixty pages. It has neither the truth of history nor the beauty of fiction. It abounds in commonplace prodigies, and sets forth Charlemagne's wars and his defeat in the valley of Roncesvalles, an event which probably never happened. Insignificant as it is in every other respect, however, it is the seed from which have sprung up those romantic fictions which adorned the rude age of the Normans, and which flourished in such wide luxuriance under Italian culture.

No one will venture to put so charitable a construction upon his lordship's motives.

Whatever may have been the intention of Pulci in the preceding portion of the work, its concluding cantos are animated by the genuine spirit of Christian heroism. The rear of Charlemagne's army is drawn into an ambuscade by the treachery of his confidant Ganelon. Roncesvalles, a valley in the heart of the Pyrenees, is the theatre of action, and Orlando, with the flower of French chivalry, perishes there, overpowered by the Saracens. The battle is told in a sublime epic tone worthy of the occasion. The cantos xxvi., xxvii., containing it, are filled with a continued strain of high religious enthusiasm, with the varying, animating bustle of a mortal conflict, with the most solemn and natural sentiment suggested by the horror of the situation. Orlando's character rises into that of the divine warrior. His speech at the opening of the action, his lament over his unfortunate army, his melancholy reflections on the battle-field the night after the engagement, are conceived with such sublimity and pathos as attest both the poetical talent of Pulci and the grandeur and capacity of his subject. Yet the Morgante, the greater part of which is so ludicrous, is the only eminent Italian epic which has seriously described the celebrated rout at Roncesvalles.

Pulci's poem is not much read by the Italians. Its style, in general, is too unpolished for the fastidious delicacy of a modern ear, but, as it abounds in the old-fashioned proverbialisms (*riboboli*) of Florence, it is greatly prized by the

Tuscan purists. These familiar sayings, the elegant slang of the Florentine mob, have a value among the Italian scholars, at least among a large fraction of them, much like that of old coins with a virtuoso: the more rare and rusty, the better. They give a high relish to many of their ancient writers, who, without other merit than their antiquity, are cited as authorities in their vocabulary.* These *riboboli* are to be met with most abundantly in their old *novelle*, those especially which are made up of familiar dialogue between the lower classes of citizens. Boccaccio has very many such; Sacchetti has more than all his prolific tribe, and it is impossible for a foreigner to discern or to appreciate the merits of such a writer. The lower classes in Florence retain to this day much of their antique picturesque phraseology,† and Alfieri tells us that "it was his great delight to stand in some unnoticed corner and listen to the conversation of the mob in the marketplace."

With the exception of Orlando, Pulci has shown no great skill in delineation of character. Charlemagne and Ganelon are the prominent personages. The latter is a parody on traitors; he is a

* This has been loudly censured by many of their scholars opposed to the literary supremacy of the Della-Cruscan Academy. See, in particular, the acute treatise of Cesarotti, "Saggio sulla Filosofia delle Lingue," Parte IV.

† "The pure language of Boccaccio, and of other ancient writers, is preserved at this day much more among the lower classes of Florentine mechanics and of the neighboring peasants than among the more polished Tuscan society, whose original dialect has suffered great mutations in their intercourse with foreigners." Pignotti, Storia della Toscana, tom. ii. p. 167.

traitor to common sense. Charlemagne is a superannuated dupe, with just credulity sufficient to dovetail into all the cunning contrivances of Gan. The women have neither refinement nor virtue. The knights have none of the softer graces of chivalry; they bully and swagger like the rude heroes of Homer, and are exclusively occupied with the merciless extermination of infidels. We meet with none of the imagery, the rich sylvan scenery, so lavishly diffused through the epics of Ariosto and Boiardo. The *machinery* bears none of the airy touches of an Arabian pencil, but is made out of the cold excrescences of Northern superstition, dwarfs, giants, and necromancers. Before quitting Pulci, we must point out a passage (canto xxv., st. 229, 230) in which a devil announces to Rinaldo the existence of another continent, beyond the ocean, inhabited by mortals like himself. The theory of gravitation is also plainly intimated. As the poem was written before the voyages of Columbus and before the physical discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus, the predictions are extremely curious.* The fiend, alluding to the vulgar superstitions entertained of the Pillars of Hercules, thus addresses his companion:

> "Know that this theory is false: his bark
> The daring mariner shall urge far o'er

* Dante, two centuries before, had also expressed the same belief in an undiscovered quarter of the globe:

> "De' vostri sensi, ch'è del rimanente,
> Non vogliate negar l'esperienza,
> *Diretro al sol, del mondo senza gente.*"
>
> Inferno, canto xxvi. v. 115.

The western wave, a smooth and level plain,
Albeit the earth is fashioned like a wheel.
Man was in ancient days of grosser mould,
And Hercules might blush to learn how far
Beyond the limits he had vainly set,
The dullest sea-boat soon shall wing her way.
Men shall descry another hemisphere,
Since to one common centre all things tend;
So earth, by curious mystery divine
Well balanced, hangs amid the starry spheres.
At our antipodes are cities, states,
And thronged empires, ne'er divined of yore.
But see, the sun speeds on his western path
To glad the nations with expected light."

The dialogues of Pulci's devils respecting free will and necessity, their former glorious and their present fallen condition, have suggested many hints for our greater Milton to improve upon. The juggling frolics of these fiends at the royal banquet in Saragossa may have been the original of the comical marvels played off through the intervention of similar agents by Dr. Faust.

Notwithstanding the good faith and poetical elevation of its concluding cantos, the Morgante, according to our apprehension, is any thing but a serious romance. Not that it shows a disposition to satire, above all, to the religious satire often imputed to it; but there is a light banter, a vein of fun, running through the greater portion of it, which is quite the opposite of the lofty spirit of chivalry. Romantic fiction, among our Norman ancestors, grew so directly out of the feudal relations and adventurous spirit of the age that it was treated with all the gravity of historical record. When reproduced in the polite and artificial societies of Italy, the same fictions wore an air of

ludicrous extravagance which would no longer admit of their being repeated seriously. Recommended, however, by a proper seasoning of irony, they might still amuse as ingenious tales of wonder. This may be kept in view in following out the ramifications of Italian narrative poetry; for they will all be found, in a greater or less degree, tinctured with the same spirit of ridicule.* The circle for whom Pulci composed his epic was peculiarly distinguished by that fondness for good-humored raillery which may be considered a national trait with his countrymen.

It seems to have been the delight of Lorenzo de' Medici, as it was afterwards, in a more remarkable degree, of his son Leo Tenth, to abandon himself to the most unreserved social freedoms with the friends whom he collected around his table. The satirical epigrams which passed there in perfect good humor between his guests show, at least,

* A distinction may be pointed out between the Norman and the Italian epics of chivalry. The former, composed in the rude ages of feudal heroism, are entitled to much credit as pictures of the manners of that period; while the latter, written in an age of refinement, have been carried by their poets into such beautiful extravagances of fiction as are perfectly incompatible with a state of society at any period. Let any one compare the feats of romantic valor recorded by Froissart, the turbulent, predatory habits of the barons and *ecclesiastics* under the early Norman dynasty, as reported by Turner in his late "History of *England*," with these old romances, and he will find enough to justify our remark. Ste.-Palaye, after a diligent study of the ancient epics, speaks of them as exhibiting a picture of society closely resembling that set forth in the chronicles of the period. Turner, after as diligent an examination of early historical documents, pronounces that the facts contained in them perfectly accord with the general portraiture of manners depicted in the romances. Mém. de l'Acad. des Inscriptions, tom. xx., art. sur l'Ancien Chevalerie.—Turner's History of England from the Norman Conquest, etc., vol. i. ch. vi.

full as much merriment as manners. Machiavelli concludes his history of Florence with an elaborate portrait of Lorenzo, in which he says that "he took greater delight in frivolous pleasures, and in the society of jesters and satirists, than became so great a man." The historian might have been less austere in his commentary upon Lorenzo's taste, since he was not particularly fastidious in the selection of his own amusements.*

At the close of the fifteenth century Italy was divided into a number of small but independent states, whose petty sovereigns vied with each other not merely in the poor parade of royal pageantry, but in the liberal endowment of scientific institutions and the patronage of learned men. Almost every Italian scholar was attached to some one or other of these courtly circles, and a generous, enlightened emulation sprang up among the states of Italy, such as had never before existed in any other age or country. Among the republics of

* A letter written by Machiavelli, long unknown, and printed for the first time at Milan, 1810, gives a curious picture of his daily occupations when living in retirement on his little patrimony at a distance from Florence. Among other particulars, he mentions that it was his custom after dinner to repair to the tavern, where he passed his afternoon at cards with the company whom he ordinarily found there, consisting of the host, a miller, a butcher, and a lime-maker. Another part of the epistle exhibits a more pleasing view of the pursuits of the ex-secretary: "In the evening I return to my house and retire to my study. I then take off the rustic garments which I had worn during the day, and, having dressed myself in the apparel which I used to wear at court and in town, I mingle in the society of the great men of antiquity. I draw from them the nourishment which alone is suited to me, and during the four hours passed in this intercourse I forget all my misfortunes, and fear neither poverty nor death. In this manner I have composed a little work upon government." This *little work* was "*The Prince*."

ancient Greece the rivalship was *political.* Their *literature,* from the time of Solon, was almost exclusively Athenian. An interesting picture of the cultivated manners and intellectual pleasures of these little courts may be gathered from the *Cortigiano* of Castiglione, which contains in the introduction a particular account of the pursuits and pastimes of the court of his sovereign, the Duke of Urbino.

None of these Italian states make so shining a figure in literary history as the insignificant duchy of Ferrara. The foul crimes which defile the domestic annals of the family of Este have been forgotten in the munificent patronage extended by them to letters. The librarians of the Biblioteca Estense, Muratori and Tiraboschi, have celebrated the virtues of their native princes with the encomiastic pen of loyalty; while Ariosto and Tasso, whose misfortunes furnish but an indifferent commentary upon these eulogiums, offering to them the grateful incense of poetic adulation, have extended their names still wider by inscribing them upon their immortal epics. Their patronage had the good fortune, not always attending patronage, of developing genius. Those models of the pastoral drama, the *Aminta* of Tasso, and the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini, whose luxury of expression, notwithstanding the dictum of Dr. Johnson,* it has been found as difficult to imitate in their own tongue as it is impossible to translate

* "Dione is a counterpart to *Aminta* and *Pastor Fido*, and other trifles of the same kind, easily imitated, and unworthy of imitation." Life of Gay.

into any other; the comedies and Horatian satires of Ariosto; the *Secchia Rapita* of Tassoni, the acknowledged model of the mock-heroic poems of Pope and Boileau; and, finally, the three great epics of Italy, the *Orlando Innamorato,* the *Furioso,* and the *Gerusalemme Liberata,* were all produced, in the brief compass of a century, within the limited dominions of the House of Este. Dante had reproached Ferrara, in the thirteenth century, with never having been illustrated by the name of a poet.

Boiardo, Count of Scandiano, the author of the Orlando Innamorato, the first-born of these epics, was a subject of Hercules First, Duke of Ferrara, and by him appointed governor of Reggio. His military conduct in that office, and his learned translations from the ancient classics, show him to have been equally accomplished as a soldier and as a scholar. In the intervals of war, to which his active life was devoted, he amused himself with the composition of his long poem. He had spun this out into the sixty-seventh canto, without showing any disposition to bring it to a conclusion, when his literary labors were suddenly interrupted, as he informs us in his parting stanza, by the invasion of the French into Italy in 1494; and in the same year the author died. The Orlando Innamorato, as it advanced, had been read by its author to his friends; but no portion of it was printed till after his death, and its extraordinary merits were not then widely estimated, in consequence of its antiquated phraseology and Lombard provincialisms. A *rifacimento* some

time after appeared, by one Domenichi, who spoiled many of the beauties, without improving the style, of his original. Finally, Berni, in little more than thirty years after the death of Boiardo, new-moulded the whole poem,* with so much dexterity as to retain the substance of every verse in the original and yet to clothe them in the seductive graces of his own classical idiom. Berni's version is the only one now read in Italy, and the original poem of Boiardo is so rare in that country that it was found impossible to procure for the library of Harvard University any copy of the Innamorato more ancient than the reformed one by Domenichi.

The history of letters affords no stronger example of the power of *style* than the different fate of these two productions of Berni and Boiardo. We doubt whether the experiment would have been attended with the same result among a people by whom the nicer beauties of expression are less cultivated, as with the English, for example. If we may judge from the few specimens which we have seen extracted from the Italian original, Chaucer exhibits a more obsolete and exotic phraseology than Boiardo. Yet the partial attempt of Dryden to invest the father of English poetry with a modernized costume has had little success, and the little epic of " Palamon and

* Sismondi is mistaken in saying that Berni remodelled the Innamorato sixty years after the original. He survived Boiardo only forty-two years, and he had half completed his *rifacimento* at least ten years before his own death, as is evident from his beautiful invocation to Verona and the Po (canto xxx.), on whose banks he was then writing it, and where he was living, 1526, in the capacity of secretary to the Bishop of Verona.

Arcite (The Knight's Tale)" is much more highly relished in the rude but muscular diction of Chaucer than in the polished version of his imitator.

Whatever may be the estimation of the style, the glory of the original delineation of character and incident is to be given exclusively to Boiardo. He was the first of the epic poets who founded a romance upon the love of Orlando; and a large portion of the poem is taken up with the adventures of this hero and his doughty paladins, assembled in a remote province of China for the defence of his mistress, the beautiful Angelica:

> "When Agrican, with all his northern powers,
> Besieged Albracca, as romances tell,
> The city of Gallaphrone, from thence to win
> The fairest of her sex, Angelica
> His daughter, sought by many prowest knights,
> Both Paynim, and the peers of Charlemagne."
>
> *Paradise Regained.*

With the exception of the midnight combat between Agrican and Orlando, in which the conversion of the dying Tartar reminds one of the similar but more affecting death of Clorinda in the "Jerusalem Delivered," there is very little moral interest attached to these combats of Boiardo, which are mere gladiatorial exhibitions of hard fighting, and sharp, jealous wrangling. The fairy gardens of Falerina and Morgana, upon which the poet enters in the second book, are much better adapted to the display of his wild and exuberant imagination. No Italian writer, not even Ariosto, is comparable to Boiardo for exhibitions of fancy. En-

chantment follows enchantment, and the reader, bewildered with the number and rapidity of the transitions, looks in vain for some clue, even the slender thread of allegory which is held out by the poet, to guide him through the unmeaning marvellous of Arabian fiction. Ariosto has tempered his imagination with more discretion. Both of these great romantic poets have wrought upon the same characters, and afford, in this respect, a means of accurate comparison. Without going into details, we may observe, in general, that Boiardo has more strength than grace; Ariosto, the reverse. Boiardo's portraits are painted, or may be rather said to be sculptured, with a clear, coarse hand, out of some rude material. Ariosto's are sketched with the volatile graces, nice shades, and variable drapery of the most delicate Italian pencil. In female portraiture, of course, Ariosto is far superior to his predecessor. The glaring coquetry of Boiardo's Angelica is refined by the hand of his rival into something like the coquetry of high life, and the ferocious tigress beauties of the original Marfisa are softened into those of a more polished and courtly amazon. The Innamorato contains no examples of the pure, deep feeling which gives a soul to the females of the Furioso, and we look in vain for the frolic and airy scenes which enchant us so frequently in the latter poem.* We may remark, in conclusion, that the rapid and unintermitting succession of incidents

* The chase of the Fairy Morgana, and the malicious dance of the Loves around Rinaldo (l. ii., c. viii., xv.), may, however, be considered good exceptions to this remark.

in the Innamorato prevents the poet from indulging in those collateral beauties of sentiment and imagery which are prodigally diffused over the romance of Ariosto, and which give to it an exquisite finish.

Berni's *rifacimento* of the Orlando Innamorato, as we have already observed, first made it popular with the Italians, by a magical varnish of versification, which gave greater lustre to the beauties of his original and glossed over its defects. It has, however, the higher merit of exhibiting a great variety of *original* reflections, sometimes in the form of digressions, but more frequently as introductions to the cantos. These are enlivened by the shrewd wit and *elaborate artlessness* of expression that form the peculiar attraction of Berni's poetry. In one of the prefatory stanzas to the fifty-first canto the reader may recognize a curious coincidence with a well-known passage in Shakspeare, —the more so as Berni, we believe, was never turned into English before the present partial attempt of Mr. Rose:

"Who steals a bugle-horn, a ring, a steed,
Or such-like worthless thing, has some discretion;
'Tis petty larceny; not such his deed
Who robs us of our fame, our best possession.
And he who takes our labor's worthiest meed
May well be deem'd a felon by profession,
Who so much more our hate and scourge deserves
As from the rule of right he wider swerves."

In another of these episodes the poet has introduced a portrait of himself. The whole passage is too long for insertion here; but, as Mr. Rose has

also translated it, we will borrow a few stanzas from his skilful version:

"His mood was choleric, and his tongue was vicious.
But he was praised for singleness of heart;
Not tax'd as avaricious or ambitious,
Affectionate and frank, and void of art;
A lover of his friends, and unsuspicious,
But where he hated knew no middle part;
And men his malice by his love might rate:
But then he was more prone to love than hate.

"To paint his person, this was thin and dry;
Well sorting it, his legs were spare and lean;
Broad was his visage, and his nose was high,
While narrow was the space that was between
His eyebrows sharp; and blue his hollow eye,
Which for his bushy beard had not been seen,
But that the master kept this thicket clear'd,
At mortal war with mustache and with beard.

"No one did ever servitude detest
Like him, though servitude was still his dole;
Since fortune or the devil did their best
To keep him evermore beneath control.
While, whatsoever was his patron's hest,
To execute it went against his soul;
His service would he freely yield unask'd,
But lost all heart and hope if he were task'd.

"Nor music, hunting-match, nor mirthful measure,
Nor play, nor other pastime, moved him aught;
And if 'twas true that horses gave him pleasure,
The simple sight of them was all he sought,
Too poor to purchase; and his only treasure
His naked bed; his pastime to do naught
But tumble there, and stretch his weary length,
And so recruit his spirits and his strength."

Rose's Innamorato, p. 48.

The passage goes on to represent the dreamy and luxurious pleasures of this indolent pastime, with such an epicurean minuteness of detail as puts the sincerity of the poet beyond a doubt. His

smaller pieces—*Capitoli,* as they are termed—contain many incidental allusions which betray the same lazy propensity.

The early part of Berni's life was passed in Rome, where he obtained a situation under the ecclesiastical government. He was afterwards established in a canonry at Florence, where he led an easy, effeminate life, much caressed for his social talents by the Duke Alessandro de' Medici. His end was more tragical than was to have been anticipated from so quiet and unambitious a temper. He is said to have been secretly assassinated, 1536, by the order of Alexander, for refusing to administer poison to the duke's enemy, the Cardinal Hyppolito de' Medici. The story is told in many contradictory ways by different Italian writers, some of whom disbelieve it altogether. The imputation, however, is an evidence of the profligate character of that court, and, if true, is only one out of many examples of perfidious assassination, which in that age dishonored some of the most polished societies in Italy.

Berni has had the distinction of conferring his name on a peculiar species of Italian composition.* The epithet "*Bernesco*" is not derived, however, as has been incorrectly stated by some foreign scholars,† from his reformed version of the "Orlando," but from his smaller pieces, his *Capi-*

* He cannot be properly considered its *inventor,* however. He lived in time to give the last polish to a species of familiar poetry which had been long undergoing the process of refinement from the hands of his countrymen.

† Vide Annotazioni alla Vita di Berni, dal conte Mazzuchelli, Clas. Ital., p. xxxiv.

toli more especially. It is difficult to convey a correct and adequate notion of this kind of satirical trifling, since its chief excellence results from idiomatic felicities of expression that refuse to be transplanted into a foreign tongue, and there is no imitation of it, that we recollect, in our own language. It is a misapplication of the term Bernesque to apply it, as has been sometimes done, to the ironical style supposed to have been introduced by Lord Byron in his Beppo and Don Juan. The clear, unequivocal vein of irony which plays through the sportive sallies of the Italian has no resemblance to the subdued but caustic sneer of the Englishman; nor does it, in our opinion, resemble in the least Peter Pindar's burlesque satire, to which an excellent critic in Italian poetry has compared it.* Pindar is much too unrefined in versification and in diction to justify the parallel. Italian poetry always preserves the purity of its expression, however coarse or indecent may be the topic on which it is employed. The subjects of many of these poems are of the most whimsical and trivial nature. We find some in *Lode della Peste, del Debito,* etc.; several in commendation of the delicacies of the table, of " jellies," " eels," or any other dainty which pleased his epicurean palate. These *Capitoli,* like most of the compositions of this polished versifier, furnish a perfect example of the triumph of style. The sentiments, sometimes indelicate, and often puerile, may be considered, like the worthless insects occasionally found in amber, indebted for their preservation

*Roscoe's Life of Lorenzo de' Medici, vol. i. p. 392, *note*.

to the beautiful substance in which they are imbedded.

It is a curious fact that, notwithstanding the apparent facility and fluent graces of Berni's style, it was wrought with infinite care. Some of his verses have been corrected twenty and thirty times. Many of his countrymen have imitated it, mistaking its familiarity of manner for facility of execution.

This fastidious revision has been common with the most eminent Italian poets. Petrarch devoted months to the perfecting of one of his exquisite sonnets.* Ariosto, as his son Virginius records of him, "was never satisfied with his verses, but was continually correcting and recorrecting them;" almost every stanza in the last edition of his poem published in his lifetime is altered from the original, and one verse is pointed out (canto xviii., st. 142) whose variations filled many pages. Tasso's manuscripts, preserved in the library at Modena, have been so often retouched by him that they are hardly intelligible; and Alfieri was in the habit not only of correcting verses, but of remoulding whole tragedies, several of which, he

* The following is a literal translation of a succession of memorandums in Latin at the head of one of his sonnets: "I began this by the impulse of the Lord (*Domino jubente*), tenth September, at the dawn of day, after my morning prayers."

"I must make these two verses over again, singing them, and I must transpose them. Three o'clock A.M., 19th October."

"I like this (*Hoc placet*). 30th October."

"No, this does not please me. 20th December, in the evening."

"February 18th, towards noon. This is now well: however, look at it again."

It was generally on Friday that he occupied himself with the painful labor of correction, and this was also set apart by him as a day of fast and penitence. Essays, *cit. sup.*

tells us in his Memoirs, were thus transcribed by him no less than three times. It is remarkable that, in a country where the imagination has been most active, the labor of the file should have been most diligently exerted on poetical compositions. Such examples of the pains taken by men of real genius might furnish a wholesome hint to some of the rapid, dashing writers of our own day. "Avec quelque talent qu'on puisse être né," says Rousseau, in his Confessions, "l'art d'écrire ne se prend pas tout d'un coup."

We have violated the chronological series of the Italian epopee, in our notice of Berni, in order to connect his poem with the model on which it was cast. We will quit him with the remark that for his fame he seems to have been as much indebted to good fortune as to desert. His countrymen have affixed his name to an illustrious poem of which he was not the author, and to a popular species of composition of which he was not the inventor.

In little more than twenty years after the death of Boiardo, Ariosto gave to the world his first edition of the *Orlando Furioso*. The celebrity of the Innamorato made Ariosto prefer building upon this sure foundation to casting a new one of his own, and, as his predecessor had fortunately left all the *dramatis personæ* of his unfinished epic alive upon the stage, he had only to continue their histories to the end of the drama. "As the former of these two poems has no termination, and the latter no regular beginning, they may both be considered as forming one complete epic."*

* Tasso, Discorsi Poetici, p. 29.

The latter half was, however, destined not only to supply the deficiencies but to eclipse the glories of the former.

Louis Ariosto was born of a respectable family at Reggio, 1474. After serving a reluctant apprenticeship of five years in the profession of the law, his father allowed him to pursue other studies better adapted to his taste and poetical genius. The elegance of his lyrical compositions in Latin and Italian recommended him to the patronage of the Cardinal Hyppolito d'Este, and of his brother Alphonso, who in 1505 succeeded to the ducal throne of Ferrara. Ariosto's abilities were found, however, not to be confined to poetry, and, among other offices of trust, he was employed by the duke in two important diplomatic negotiations with the court of Rome. But the Muses still obtained his principal homage, and all his secret leisure was applied to the perfecting of the great poem which was to commemorate at once his own gratitude and the glories of the house of Este. After fourteen years' assiduous labor, he presented to the Cardinal Hyppolito the first copy of his Orlando Furioso. The well-known reply of the prelate, "*Messer Lodovico, dove mai avete trovate tante fanfaluche?*" ("Master Louis, where have you picked up so many trifles?") will be remembered in Italy as long as the poem itself.*

Ariosto, speaking of his early study of jurisprudence in one of his Satires,† says that he passed

* An interrogation which might remind an Englishman of that put by the *great* Duke of Cumberland to Gibbon: "What, Mr. Gibbon, scribble, scribble, scribble still?"

† A M. Pietro Bembo Cardinale.

five years *in quelle ciancie,*—a word which signifies much the same with the epithet *fanfaluche* or *coglionerie,* whichever it might have been, imputed to the cardinal. Ariosto was a poet; the cardinal was a mathematician; and each had the very common failing of undervaluing a profession different from his own. The courtly librarian of the Biblioteca Estense endeavors to explain away this and the subsequent conduct of Ariosto's patron ; * but the poet's Satires, in which he alludes to the behavior of the cardinal with the fine raillery, and to his own situation with the philosophic independence, of Horace, furnish abundant evidence of the cold, ungenerous deportment of Hyppolito.†

Notwithstanding the alienation of the cardinal, the poet still continued in favor with Alphonso. The patronage bestowed upon him, however, seems to have been of a very selfish and sordid complexion. He was employed by the duke in offices most vexatious to one of his studious disposition, and he passed three years in reducing to tranquil-

* Storia della Letteratura Italiana, tom. vii. pt. i. pp. 42, 43.

† In a satire addressed to Alessandro Ariosto, he speaks openly of the unprofitableness of his poetic labors:

"Thanks to the Muses who reward
So well the service of their bard,
He almost may be said to lack
A decent coat to clothe his back."

And soon after, in the same epistle, he adverts with undisguised indignation to the oppressive patronage of Hyppolito:

"If the poor stipend I receive
Has led his highness to believe
He has a right to task my toil
Like any serf's upon his soil,

lity a barbarous, rebellious province of the duchy. His adventure there with a troop of banditti, who abandoned a meditated attack upon him when they learned that he was the author of the Orlando Furioso, is a curious instance of homage to literary talent, which may serve as a *pendant* to the similar anecdote recorded of Tasso.*

The latter portion of his life was passed on his own estate in comparative retirement. He refused all public employment, and, with the exception of his satires, and a few comedies which he prepared for the theatre committed to his superintendence by Alphonso, he produced no new work. His hours were diligently occupied with the emendation and extension of his great poem; and in 1532, soon after the republication of it in forty-six cantos, as it now stands, he died of a disease induced by severe and sedentary application.

> T' enthrall me with a servile chain
> That grinds my soul, his hopes are vain.
> Sooner than be such household slave,
> The sternest poverty I'll brave,
> And, from his pride and presents free,
> Resume my long-lost liberty."

* Ginguené, whose facts are never to be suspected, whatever credit may be attached to his opinions, has related both these adventures without any qualification (Histoire littéraire d'Italie, tom. iv. p. 359, tom. v. p. 291). This learned Frenchman professes to have compiled his history under the desire of vindicating Italian literature from the disparaging opinions entertained of it among his countrymen. This has led him to swell the trumpet of panegyric somewhat too stoutly,—indeed, much above the modest tone of the Italian *savant* who, upon his premature death, was appointed to continue the work. Ginguené died before he had completed the materials for his ninth volume, and the hiatus supplied by Professor Salfi carries down the literary narrative only to the conclusion of the sixteenth century.

Ariosto is represented to have possessed a cheerful disposition, temperate habits, and their usual concomitant, a good constitution. Barotti has quoted, in his memoirs of the poet, some particulars respecting him, found among the papers of Virginius, his natural son. He is there said not to have been a great reader; Horace and Catullus were the authors in whom he took most delight. His intense meditation upon the subject of his compositions frequently betrayed him into fits of abstraction, one of which is recorded. Intending, on a fine morning, to take his usual walk, he set out from Carpi, where he resided, and reached Ferrara late in the afternoon, in his slippers and *robe de chambre,* uninterrupted by any one. His patrimony, though small, was equal to his necessities. An inscription which he placed over his door is indicative of that moderation and love of independence which distinguished his character:

> "Parva, sed apta mihi, sed nulli obnoxia, sed non
> Sordida, parta meo sed tamen ære domus."

It does not appear probable that he was ever married. He frequently alludes in his poems to some object of his affections, but without naming her. His bronze inkstand, still preserved in the library at Ferrara, is surmounted by a *rilievo* of a Cupid with his finger upon his lip, emblematic of a discreet silence not very common in these matters with his countrymen. He is said to have intended his mistress by the beautiful portrait of Ginevra (cantos iv., v.), as Tasso afterwards shadowed out Leonora in the affecting episode of Sophronia.

This was giving them, according to Ariosto's own allusion, a glorious niche in the temple of immortality.*

There still existed a general affectation among the Italian scholars of writing in the Latin language, when Ariosto determined to compose an epic poem. The most accomplished proficients in that ancient tongue flourished about this period, and Politian, Pontano, Vida, Sannazarius, Sadolet, Bembo, had revived, both in prose and poetry, the purity, precision, and classic elegance of the Augustan age. Politian and Lorenzo de' Medici were the only writers of the preceding century who had displayed the fecundity and poetical graces of their vernacular tongue, and their productions had been too few and of too trifling a nature to establish a permanent precedent. Bembo, who wrote his elaborate history first in Latin, and who carried the complicated inversions, in fact, the idiom, of that language into his Italian compositions, would have persuaded Ariosto to write his poem in the same tongue; but he wisely replied that "he would rather be first among Tuscan writers than second among the Latin," and, following the impulse of his own more discriminating taste, he gave, in the Orlando Furioso, such an exhibition of the fine tones and flexible movements of his native language as settled the question of its precedence forever with his countrymen.

Ariosto at first intended to adopt the *terza rima* of Dante; indeed, the introductory verses of his

* Orlando Furioso, canto xxxv., st. 15, 16.

poem in this measure are still preserved. He soon abandoned it, however, for the *ottava rima,* which is much better adapted to the light, rambling, picturesque narrative of the romantic epic.* Every stanza furnishes a little picture in itself, and the perpetual recurrence of the same rhyme produces not only a most agreeable melody to the ear, but is very favorable to a full and more powerful development of the poet's sentiments. Instances of the truth of this remark must be familiar to every reader of Ariosto. It has been applied by Warton, with equal justice, to Spenser, whom the similar repetition of identical cadences often leads to a copious and beautiful expansion of imagery.† Spenser's stanza differs materially from the Italian *ottava rima,* in having one more rhyme, and in the elongated Alexandrine with which it is concluded. This gave to his verses " the long, majes-

* The Italians, since the failure of Trissino, have very generally adopted this measure for their epic poetry, while the *terza rima* is used for didactic and satirical composition. The graver subjects which have engaged the attention of some of their poets during the last century have made blank verse (*verso sciolto*) more fashionable among them. Cesarotti's Ossian, one of the earliest, may be cited as one of the most successful examples of it. No nation is so skilful in a nice adaptation of style to the subject, and *imitative harmony* has been carried by them to a perfection which it can never hope to attain in any other living language; for what other language is made so directly out of the elements of music?

† The following stanza from the " Faerie Queene," describing the habitation of Morpheus " drowned deep in drowsie fit," may serve as an exemplification of our meaning:

" And more to lull him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And ever drizling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde much like the sowne

tic march," well suited to the sober sublimity of his genius; but the additional rhyme much increased its metrical difficulties, already, from the comparative infrequency of assonances in our language, far superior to those of the Italian. This has few compound sounds, but, rolling wholly upon the five open vowels, *a, e, i, o, u,* affords a prodigious number of corresponding terminations. Hence their facility of *improvisation.* Voltaire observes that in the Jerusalem Delivered not more than seven words terminate in *u,* and expresses his astonishment that we do not find a greater monotony in the constant recurrence of only four rhymes.* The reason may be that in Italian poetry the rhyme falls both upon the penultima and the final syllable of each verse; and, as these two syllables in the same word turn upon different vowels, a greater variety is given to the melody. This double rhyming termination, moreover, gives an inexpressible lightness and delicacy to Italian poetry, very different from the broad comic which similar compound rhymes, no doubt from the infrequency of their application to serious subjects, communicate to the English.

Ariosto is commonly most admired for the inexhaustible fertility of his fancy; yet a large proportion of his fictions are borrowed, copied, or con-

> Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne;
> No other noyes nor people's troublous cryes,
> As still are wont to annoy the walled towne,
> Might there be heard; but careless quiet lyes,
> Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemyes."

* Lettre à Deodati di Tovazzi.

tinued from those of preceding poets. The elegant allegories of ancient superstition, as they were collected or invented by Homer and Ovid, the wild adventures of the Norman romances, the licentious merriment of the gossiping fabliaux, and the enchantments of Eastern fable, have all been employed in the fabric of Ariosto's epic. But, although this diminishes his claims to an inventive fancy, yet, on the whole, it exalts his character as a poet; for these same fictions under the hands of preceding romancers, even of Boiardo, were cold and uninteresting, or, at best, raised in the mind of the reader only a stupid admiration, like that occasioned by the grotesque and unmeaning wonders of a fairy-tale. But Ariosto inspired them with a deep and living interest; he adorned them with the graces of sentiment and poetic imagery, and enlivened them by a vein of wit and shrewd reflection.

Ariosto's style is most highly esteemed by his countrymen. The clearness with which it expresses the most subtle and delicate beauties of sentiment may be compared to Alcina's

> "vel sottile e rado,
> Che non copria dinanzi nè di dietro,
> Più che le rose o i gigli un chiaro vetro."—C. vii. s. 28.*

We recollect no English poet whose manner in any degree resembles him. La Fontaine, the most exquisite versifier of his nation, when in his least

> * "A thin transparent veil,
> That all the beauties of her form discloses,
> As the clear crystal doth th' imprison'd roses."

familiar mood, comes the nearest to him among the French. Spence remarks that Spenser must have imagined Ariosto intended to write a serious romantic poem. The same opinion has been maintained by some of the Italian critics. Such, however, is not the impression we receive from it. Not to mention the broad farce with which the narrative is occasionally checkered, as the adventures of Giocondo, the Enchanted Cup, etc., a sly suppressed smile seems to lurk at the bottom even of his most serious reflections; sometimes, indeed, it plays openly upon the surface of his narrative, but more frequently, after a beautiful and sober description, it breaks out, as it were, from behind a cloud, and lights up the whole with a gay and comic coloring. It would seem as if the natural acuteness of his poetic taste led him to discern in the *magnanime mensonge* of romantic fable abundant sources of the grand and beautiful, while the anti-chivalric character of his age, and, still more, the lively humor of his nation, led him to laugh at its extravagances. Hence the delicate intermixture of serious and comic, which gives a most agreeable variety, though somewhat of a curious perplexity, to his style.

The Orlando Furioso went through six editions in the author's lifetime, two of which he supervised, and it passed through sixty in the course of the same century. Its poetic pretensions were of too exalted a character to allow it to be regarded as a mere fairy-tale; but it sorely puzzled the pedantic critics, both of that and of the succeeding age, to find out a justification for admitting it,

with all its fantastic eccentricities, into the ranks of epic poetry. Multitudes have attacked and defended it upon this ground, and justice was not rendered to it until the more enlightened criticism of a later day set all things right by pointing out the distinction between the romantic and the classical.*

The cold and precise Boileau, who, like most of his countrymen, seems to have thought that beauty could wear only one form, and to have mistaken the beginnings of ancient art for its principles, quoted Horace to prove that no poet had the right to produce such grotesque combinations of the tragical and comic as are found in Ariosto.† In the last century, Voltaire, a critic of a much wider range of observation, objects to a narrow, exclusive definition of an epic poem, on the just ground " that works of imagination depend so much on the different languages and tastes of the different nations among whom they are produced, that precise definitions must have a tendency to exclude all beauties that are unknown or unfamiliar to us." (*Essai sur la Poésie épique.*) In less than forty pages farther we find, however, that " the Orlando Furioso, although popular with the mass of

* Hurd and T. Warton seem to have been among the earliest English writers who insisted upon the distinction between the Gothic and the classical. In their application of it to Spenser they display a philosophical criticism, guided not so much by ancient rules as by the peculiar genius of modern institutions. How superior this to the pedantic dogmas of the French school, or of such a caviller as Rymer, whom Dryden used to quote, and Pope extolled as " the best of English critics!"

† Dissertation critique sur l'Aventure de Joconde. Œuvres de Boileau, tom. ii. p. 151.

readers, is very inferior to the *genuine epic poem.*" Voltaire's general reflections were those of a philosopher; their particular application was that of a Frenchman.

At a later period of his life he made a recantation of this precipitate opinion; and he even went so far, in a parallel between the Furioso and the Odyssey, which he considered the *model* of the Italian poem, as to give a decided preference to the former. Ariosto's imitations of the Odyssey, however, are not sufficient to authorize its being considered the model of his epic. Where these imitations do exist, they are not always the happiest efforts of his muse. The tedious and disgusting adventure of the Ogre, borrowed from that of the Cyclops Polypheme, is one of the greatest blemishes in the Furioso. Such "Jack the giant-killing" horrors do not blend happily with the airy and elegant fictions of the East. The *familiarity* of Ariosto's manner has an apparent resemblance to the *simplicity* of Homer's, which vanishes upon nearer inspection. The unaffected ease common to both resembles, in the Italian, the fashionable breeding that grows out of a perfect intimacy with the forms of good society. In the Greek it is rather an artlessness which results from never having been embarrassed by the conventional forms of society at all. Ariosto is perpetually addressing his reader in the most familiar tone of conversation; Homer pursues his course with the undeviating dignity of an epic poet. He tells all his stories, even the incredible, with an air of confiding truth. The Italian poet frequently qualifies

his with some sly reference or apology, as, "I will not vouch for it; I repeat only what Turpin has told before me:"

"Mettendo lo Turpin, lo metto anch' io." *

Ariosto's narratives are complicated and interrupted in a most provoking manner. This has given offence to some of his warmest admirers, and to the severe taste of Alfieri in particular. Yet this fault, if indeed it be one, seems imputable to the art, not to the artist. He but followed preceding romancers, and conformed to the laws of his peculiar species of poetry. This involution of the narrative may be even thought to afford a relief and an agreeable contrast, by its intermixture of grave and comic incidents; at least, this is the apology set up for the same peculiarities of our own romantic drama. But, whatever exceptions may be taken by the acuteness or ignorance of critics at the conduct of the Orlando Furioso, the sagacity of its general plan is best vindicated by its wide and permanent popularity in its own country. None of their poets is so universally read by the Italians; and the epithet *divine,* which the homage of an enlightened few had before appropriated to Dante, has been conferred by the voice of the whole nation upon the "Homer of Ferrara."† While those who copied

* Voltaire, with all his aversion to local prejudices, was too national to relish the naked simplicity of Homer. One of his witty reflections may show how he esteemed him. Speaking of Virgil's obligations to the Greek poet, "Some say," he observes, "that Homer made Virgil; if so, this is, without doubt, the best work he ever made!" *si cela est, c'est sans doute son plus bel ouvrage.*

† The name originally given to him by his rival Tasso.

the classical models of antiquity are forgotten, Ariosto, according to the beautiful eulogium of Tasso, "partendo dalle vestigie degli antichi scrittori e dalle regole d'Aristotile, è letto e riletto da tutte l'età, da tutti i sessi, noto a tutte le lingue, ringiovanisce sempre nella sua fama, e vola glorioso per le lingue de' mortali."*

The name of Ariosto most naturally suggests this of Tasso, his illustrious but unfortunate rival in the same brilliant career of epic poetry; for these two seem to hold the same relative rank, and to shed a lustre over the Italian poetry of the sixteenth century like that reflected by Dante and Petrarch upon the fourteenth. The interest always attached to the misfortunes of genius has been heightened, in the case of Tasso, by the veil of mystery thrown over them; and while his sorrows have been consecrated by the "melodious tear" of the poet, the causes of them have furnished a most fruitful subject of speculation to the historian.

He had been early devoted by his father to the study of jurisprudence, but, as with Ariosto, a love for the Muses seduced him from his severer duties. His father remonstrated; but Tasso, at the age of seventeen, produced his *Rinaldo,* an epic in twelve cantos, and the admiration which it excited throughout Italy silenced all future opposition on the part of his parent. In 1565, Tasso, then twenty-one years of age, was received into the family of the Cardinal Luigi d'Este, to whom he had dedicated his precocious epic. The brilliant as-

* Discorsi Poetici, p. 33.

semblage of rank and beauty at the little court of Ferrara excited the visions of the youthful poet, while its richly-endowed libraries and learned societies furnished a more solid nourishment to his understanding. Under these influences, he was perpetually giving some new display of his poetic talent. His vein flowed freely in lyrical composition, and he is still regarded as one of the most perfect models in that saturated species of national poetry.

In 1573 he produced his *Aminta,* which, in spite of its conceits and pastoral extravagances, exhibited such a union of literary finish and voluptuous sentiment as was to be found in no other Italian poem. It was translated into all the cultivated tongues in Europe, and was followed, during the lifetime of its author, by more than twenty imitations in Italy. No valuable work ever gave birth to a more worthless progeny. The *Pastor Fido* of Guarini is by far the best of these imitations; but its elaborate luxury of wit is certainly not comparable to the simple, unsolicited beauties of the original. Tasso was, however, chiefly occupied with the composition of his great epic. He had written six cantos in a few months, but he was nearly ten years in completing it. He wrote with the rapidity of genius, but corrected with scrupulous deliberation. His "Letters" show the unwearied pains which he took to obtain the counsel of his friends, and his critical "Discourses" prove that no one could stand less in need of such counsel than himself. In 1575 he completed his "Jerusalem Delivered." Thus, before he had reached his

thirty-second year, Tasso, as a lyric, epic, and dramatic writer, may be fairly said to have earned a threefold immortality in the highest walks of his art. His subsequent fate shows that literary glory rests upon no surer basis than the accidental successes of worldly ambition.

The long and rigorous imprisonment of Tasso by the sovereign over whose reign his writings had thrown such a lustre has been as fruitful a source of speculation as the inexplicable exile of Ovid, and, in like manner, was for a long time imputed to an indiscreet and too aspiring passion in the poet. At length Tiraboschi announced, in an early edition of his history, that certain letters and original manuscripts of Tasso, lately discovered in the library of Modena, had been put into the hands of the Abbé Serassi for the farther investigation of the mysterious transaction. The abbé's work appeared in 1785, and the facts disclosed by it clearly prove that the poet's passion for Leonora was not, as formerly imagined, the origin of his misfortunes.* These may be imputed to a variety of circumstances, none of which, however, would have deeply affected a person of a less irritable or better disciplined fancy. The calum-

* We are only acquainted with Serassi's "Life of Tasso" through the epitomes of Fabroni and Ginguené. The latter writer seems to us to lay greater stress upon the poet's passion for Leonora than is warranted by his facts. Tasso dedicated, it is true, many an elegant sonnet to her charms, and distorted her name into as many ingenious puns as did Petrarch that of his mistress; but when we consider that this sort of poetical tribute is very common with the Italians, that the lady was at least ten years older than the poet, and that, in the progress of this passion, he had four or five other well-attested subordinate flames, we shall have little reason to believe it produced a deep impression on his character.

nies and petty insults which he experienced from his rivals at the court of Ferrara, a clandestine attempt to publish his poem, but, more than all, certain conscientious scruples which he entertained as to the orthodoxy of his own creed, gradually wrought upon his feverish imagination to such a degree as in a manner to unsettle his reason. He fancied that his enemies were laying snares for his life, and that they had concerted a plan for accusing him of heresy before the Inquisition.* He privately absconded from Ferrara, returned to it again, but soon after, disquieted by the same unhappy suspicions, left it precipitately a second time, without his manuscripts, without money or any means of subsistence, and, after wandering from court to court, and experiencing, in the sorrowful language of Dante,

> "Come sa di sale
> Lo pane altrui, e com' è duro calle
> Lo scendere e'l salir per l'altrui scale," †

he threw himself once more upon the clemency of Alphonso; but the duke, already alienated from him by his past extravagances, was incensed to such a degree by certain intemperate expressions of anger in which the poet indulged on his arrival at the court, that he caused him to be confined in a mad-house (Hospital of St. Anne).

* His "Letters" betray the same timid jealousy. He is perpetually complaining that his correspondence is watched and intercepted.

† "How salt the savor is of others' bread,
How hard the passage to descend and climb
By others' stairs."—CARY.

Here, in the darkness and solitude of its meanest cell, disturbed only by the cries of the wretched inmates of the mansion, he languished two years under the severest discipline of a refractory lunatic. Montaigne, in his visit to Italy, saw him in this humiliating situation, and his reflections upon it are even colder than those which usually fall from the phlegmatic philosopher.* The genius of Tasso, however, broke through the gloom of his dungeon, and several of the lyrical compositions of his imprisoned muse were as brilliant and beautiful as in the day of her prosperity. The distempered state of his imagination seems never to have clouded the vividness of his perceptions on the subjects of his composition, and during the remaining five years of his confinement at St. Anne he wrote, in the form of dialogues, several highly-esteemed disquisitions on philosophical and moral theorems. During this latter period Tasso had enjoyed a more commodious apartment, but the duke, probably dreading some literary reprisal from his injured prisoner, resisted all entreaties for his release. This was at length effected, through the intercession of the Prince of Mantua, in 1586.

Tasso quitted Ferrara without an interview with

* "I felt even more spite than compassion to see him in so miserable a state, surviving, as it were, himself, unmindful either of himself or his works, which, without his concurrence, and before his eyes, were published to the world incorrect and deformed." (Essais de Montaigne, tom. v. p. 114.) Montaigne doubtless exaggerated the mental degradation of Tasso, since it favored a position which, in the vain love of paradox that has often distinguished his countrymen, he was then endeavoring to establish, viz., the superiority of stupidity and ignorance over genius.

his oppressor, and spent the residue of his days in the south of Italy. His countrymen, affected by his unmerited persecutions, received him wherever he passed with enthusiastic triumph. The nobility and the citizens of Florence waited upon him in a body, as if to make amends for the unjust strictures of their academy upon his poem, and a day was appointed by the court of Rome for his solemn coronation in the capitol with the poetic wreath which had formerly encircled the brow of Petrarch. He died a few days before the intended ceremony. His body, attired in a Roman toga, was accompanied to the grave by nobles and ecclesiastics of the highest dignity, and his temples were decorated with the laurel of which his perverse fortune had defrauded him when living.

The unhappy fate of Tasso has affixed a deep stain on the character of Alphonso the Second. The eccentricities of his deluded fancy could not have justified seven years of solitary confinement, either as a medicine or as a punishment, least of all from the man whose name he had so loudly celebrated in one of the most glorious productions of modern genius. What a caustic commentary upon his unrelenting rigor must Alphonso have found in one of the opening stanzas of the Jerusalem:

> "Tu, magnanimo Alfonso, il qual ritogli
> Al furor di fortuna, e guidi in porto
> Me peregrino errante, e fra gli scogli
> E fra l'onde agitato, e quasi assorto;
> Queste mie carte in lieta fronte accogli," etc.

The illiberal conduct of the princes of Este both towards Ariosto and Tasso essentially diminishes

their pretensions to the munificent patronage so exclusively imputed to them by their own historians and by the eloquent pen of Gibbon.* A more accurate picture, perhaps, of the second Alphonso may be found in the concluding canto of Childe Harold, where the poet, in the language of indignant sensibility, not always so judiciously directed, has rendered more than poetical justice to the "antique brood of Este."

The Jerusalem was surreptitiously published, for the first time, during Tasso's imprisonment, and, notwithstanding the extreme inaccuracy of its early editions, it went through no less than six in as many months. Others grew rich on the productions of an author who was himself languishing in the most abject poverty,—one example out of many of the insecurity of literary property in a country where the number of distinct independent governments almost defeats the protection of a copyright.†

Notwithstanding the general admiration which

* Muratori's Antichità Estensi are expressly intended to record the virtues of the family of Este. Tiraboschi's Storia della Letteratura Italiana is a splendid panegyric upon the intellectual achievements of the whole nation. More than a due share of this praise, however, is claimed for his native princes of Ferrara. It is amusing to see by what evasions the historian attempts to justify their conduct both towards Tasso and Ariosto. Gibbon, who had less apology for partiality, in his laborious researches into the "Antiquities of the House of Brunswick" has not tempered his encomiums of the Alphonsos with a single animadversion upon their illiberal conduct towards their two illustrious subjects.

† "Foreigners," says Denina, "who ask if there are great writers in Italy now, as in times past, would be surprised at the number, were they to learn how much even the best of them are brought in debt by the publication of their own works." Vicende della Letteratura, tom. ii. p. 326.

the Jerusalem excited throughout Italy, it was assailed, on its first appearance, with the coarsest criticism it ever experienced. A comparison was naturally suggested between it and the Orlando Furioso, and the Italians became divided into the factions of Tassisti and Ariostisti. The Della-Cruscan Academy, just then instituted, in retaliation of some extravagant encomiums bestowed upon the Jerusalem, entered into an accurate but exceedingly intemperate analysis of it, in which they degraded it not only below the rival epic, but, denying it the name of a *poem,* spoke of it as " a cold and barren compilation." It is a curious fact that both the Della-Cruscan and French Academies commenced their career of criticism with an unlucky attack upon two of the most extraordinary poems in their respective languages.*

Although Tasso was only one-and-twenty years of age when he set about writing his Jerusalem, yet it is sufficiently apparent, from the sagacious criticism exhibited in his letters, that he brought to it a mind ripened by extensive studies and careful meditation. He had, moreover, the advantage of an experience derived both from his own previous labors and those of several distinguished predecessors in the same kind of composition. The learned Trissino had fashioned, some years before, a regular heroic poem, with pedantic precision, upon the models of antiquity. From this circumstance, it was so formal and tedious that nobody

* It is hardly necessary to refer to Corneille's " Cid," so clumsily anatomized by the Académie Française at the jealous instigation of Cardinal Richelieu.

could read it. Bernardo Tasso, the father of Torquato, who might apply to himself, with *equal* justice, the reverse of the younger Racine's lament,

"Et moi *père* inconnu d'un si glorieux fils,"

had commenced his celebrated Amadis with the same deference to the rules of Aristotle. Finding that the audiences of his friends, to whom he was accustomed to read the epic as it advanced, gradually thinned off, he had the discretion to take the hint, and new-cast it in a more popular and romantic form. Notwithstanding these inauspicious examples, Tasso was determined to give to his national literature what it so much wanted, a great heroic poem; his fine eye perceived at once, however, all the advantages to be derived from the peculiar institutions of the moderns, and, while he conformed, in the general plan of his epic, to the precepts of antiquity, he animated it with the popular and more exalted notions of love, of chivalry, and of religion. His Jerusalem exhibits a perfect combination of the romantic and the classical.

The subject which he selected was most happily adapted to his complicated design. However gloomy a picture the Crusades may exhibit to the rational historian, they are one of the most brilliant and imposing ever offered to the eye of the poet. It is surprising that a subject so fruitful in marvellous and warlike adventure, and which displays the full triumph of Christian chivalry, should have been so long neglected by the writers of epical romance. The plan of the Jerusalem is not with-

out defects, which have been pointed out by the Italians, and bitterly ridiculed by Voltaire, whose volatile sarcasms have led him into one or two blunders that have excited much wrath among some of Tasso's countrymen.* The conceits which occasionally glitter on the surface of Tasso's clear and polished style have afforded another and a fair ground for censure. Boileau's metaphorical distich, however, has given to them an undeserved importance. The epithet *tinsel* (clinquant), used by him without any limitation, was quoted by his countrymen as fixing the value at once of all Tasso's compositions, and afterwards, by an easy transition, of that of the whole body of Italian literature. Boileau subsequently diluted this censure of the Italian poet with some partial commendations; † but its ill effects were visible in the unfavorable prejudices which it left on the minds

* Among other heinous slanders, he had termed the musical bird "di color vari" "e purpureo rostro" in Armida's gardens a "*parrot*," and the "fatal Donzella" (canto xv.), "whose countenance was beautiful like that of the angels," an "*old woman*," which his Italian censor assures his countrymen "is much worse than a *vecchia donna*." For the burst of indignation which these and similar sins brought upon Voltaire's head, vide Annotazioni di Canti xv., xvi., Clas. Ital.

† Both Ginguené and some Italian critics affect to consider these commendations as an *amende honorable* on the part of Boileau. They, however, amount to very little, and, like the Frenchman's compliment to Yorick, have full as much of bitter as of sweet in them. The remarks quoted by D'Olivet (Histoire de l'Académie Française) as having been made by the critic a short time previous to his death, are a convincing proof, on the other hand, that he was tenacious to the last of his original heresy. "So little," said he, "have I changed, that, on reviewing Tasso of late, I regretted exceedingly that I had not been more explicit in my strictures upon him." He then goes on to supply the hiatus by taking up all the blemishes in detail which he had before only alluded to *en gros*.

of his own countrymen, and on those of the English, for nearly a century.

The affectations imputed to Tasso are to be traced to a much more remote origin. Petrarch's best productions are stained with them, as are those of preceding poets, Cino da Pistoja, Guido Cavalcanti, and others,* and they seem to have flowed directly from the Provençal, the copious fountain of Italian lyrical poetry. Tiraboschi referred their introduction to the influence of Spanish literature under the viceroys of Naples during the latter part of the sixteenth century, which provoked a patriotic replication, in seven volumes, from the Spanish Abbé Lampillas. The Italian had the better of his adversary in temper, if not in argument. This false refinement was brought to its height during the first half of the seventeenth century, under Marini and his imitators, and it is somewhat maliciously intimated by Denina that the foundation of the Academy Della Crusca corresponds with the *commencement* of the decay of good taste.† Some of their early publications prove that they have at least as good a claim to be considered its promoters as Tasso.‡

* These veteran versifiers have been condensed into two volumes 8vo, in an edition published at Florence, 1816, under the title of Poeti del Primo Secolo.

† Vicende della Letteratura, tom. ii. p. 52.

‡ A distinction seems to be authorized between the ancients and the moderns in regard to what is considered *purity of taste*. The earliest writings of the former are distinguished by it, and it fell into decay only with the decline of the nation; while a vicious taste is visible in the earliest stages of modern literature, and it has been corrected only by the corresponding refinement of the nation. The Greek language was written in classic purity from Homer until long after Greece herself had become tributary to the Romans, and the

Tasso is the most lyrical of all epic poets. This often weakens the significance and picturesque delineation of his narrative, by giving to it an ideal and too general character. His eight-line stanza is frequently wrought up, as it were, into a miniature sonnet. He himself censures Ariosto for occasionally indulging this lyrical vein in his romance, and cites as an example the celebrated comparison of the virgin and the rose (canto i., s. 42). How many similar examples may be found in his own epic! The gardens of Armida are full of them. To this cause we may perhaps ascribe the glittering affectations, the *clinquant,* so often noticed in his poetry. Dazzling and epigrammatic points are often solicited in sonnets. To the same cause may be referred, in part, the nicely-adjusted harmony of his verses. It would almost seem as if each stanza was meant to be set to music, as Petrarch is known to have composed many of his odes with this view.* The melodious rhythm of Tasso's verse has none of the monotonous sweetness so cloying in Metastasio. It is diversified by all the modulations of an exquisitely sensible ear. For this reason, no Italian poet is so frequently in the mouths of the common people. Ariosto's familiar style and lively narrative are

Latin tongue from the time of Terence till the nation had sacrificed its liberties to its emperors; while the early Italian authors, as we have already seen, the Spaniards in the age of Ferdinand, the English in that of Elizabeth, and the French under Francis the First (the epochs which may fix the dawn of their respective literatures), seem to have been deeply infected with a passion for conceits and quibbles, which has been purified only by the diligent cultivation of ages.

* Foscolo, "Essay," etc., p. 93.

better suited to the popular apprehension; but the lyrical melody of Tasso triumphs over these advantages in his rival, and enables him literally *virûm volitare per ora.* It was once common for the Venetian gondoliers to challenge each other and to respond in the verses of the Jerusalem, and this sort of musical contest might be heard for hours in the silence of a soft summer evening. The same beautiful ballads, if we may so call these fragments of an epic, are still occasionally chanted by the Italian peasant, who is less affected by the sublimity of their sentiments than the musical flow of the expression.*

Tasso's sentiments are distinguished, in our opinion, by a moral grandeur surpassing that of any other Italian poet. His devout mind seems to have been fully inspired with the spirit of his subject. We say in our opinion, for an eminent German critic, F. Schlegel, is disposed to deny him this merit. We think in this instance he must have proposed to himself what is too frequent with the Germans,—an ideal and exaggerated standard of elevation. A few stanzas (st. 1 to 19) in the fourth canto of the Jerusalem may be said to contain almost the whole argument of the Paradise Lost. The convocation of the devils in the dark abyss,† the picture of Satan, whom he injudiciously names Pluto, his sublime address to his

* "The influence of metrical harmony is visible in the lower classes, who commit to memory the stanzas of Tasso, and sing them without comprehending them. They even disfigure the language so as to make nonsense of it, their senses deceived all the while by the unmeaning melody." Pignotti, Storia, etc., tom. iv. p. 192.

† The semi-stanza which describes the hoarse reverberations of the

confederates, in which he alludes to their rebellion and the subsequent creation of man, were the germs of Milton's most glorious conceptions. Dante had before shadowed forth Satan, but it was only in the physical terrors of a hideous aspect and gigantic stature. The ancients had clothed the Furies in the same external deformities. Tasso, in obedience to the superstitions of his age, gave to the devil similar attributes, but he invested his character with a moral sublimity which raised it to the rank of divine intelligences:

"Ebbero i più felici allor vittoria
Rimase a noi d'invitto ardir la gloria."

"Sia destin ciò ch'io voglio."

In the literal version of Milton,

"What I will is fate."

Sentiments like these also give to Satan, in Paradise Lost, his superb and terrific majesty. Milton, however, gave a finer finish to the portrait, by dispensing altogether with the bugbear deformities of his person, and by depicting it as a form that

"Had yet not lost
All its original brightness, nor appear'd
Less than archangel ruin'd."

It seems to us a capital mistake in Tasso to have

infernal trumpet in this Pandemonium is cited by the Italians as a happy example of imitative harmony:

"Chiama gli abitator dell' ombre eterne
Il rauco suon della tartarea tromba.
Treman le spaziose atre caverne,
E l'aer cieco a quel romor rimbomba."

made so little use of the *diablerie* which he has so powerfully portrayed. Almost all the machinations of the infidels in the subsequent cantos turn upon the agency of petty necromancers.

Tasso frequently deepens the expression of his pictures by some skilful moral allusion. How finely has he augmented the misery of the soldier perishing under a consuming drought before the walls of Jerusalem, by recalling to his imagination the cool and crystal waters with which he had once been familiar!

> "Se alcun giammai tra frondeggianti rive
> Puro vide stagnar liquido argento,
> O giù precipitose ir acque vive
> Per Alpe, o'n piaggia erbosa a passo lento;
> Quelle al vago desio forma e descrive,
> E ministra materia al suo tormento;
> Che l'imagine lor gelida e molle
> L'asciuga e scalda, e nel pensier ribolle." *
>
> Canto xiii., st. 60.

In all the manifold punishments of Dante's "Hell" we remember one only in which the *mind* is made use of as a means of torture. A counterfeiter (*barratiere*) contrasts his situation in these dismal regions with his former pleasant residence in the green vale of the Arno; an allusion which adds a new sting to his anguish and gives a fine moral coloring to the picture. Dante was the first great Christian poet that had written; and when, in conformity with the charitable spirit of

> * "He that the gliding rivers erst had seen
> Adown their verdant channels gently roll'd,
> Or falling streams, which to the valleys green
> Distill'd from tops of Alpine mountains cold,

his age, he assigned all the ancient heathens a place either in his *hell* or *purgatory,* he inflicted upon them corporeal punishments which alone had been threatened by their poets.

Both Ariosto and Tasso elaborated the style of their compositions with infinite pains. This labor, however, led them to the most opposite results. It gave to the Furioso the airy graces of elegant conversation; to the Gerusalemme a stately and imposing eloquence. In this last you may often find a consummate art carried into affectation, as in the former natural beauty is sometimes degraded into vulgarity, and even obscenity. Ariosto has none of the national vices of style imputed to his rival, but he is tainted with the less excusable impurities of sentiment. It is stated by a late writer that the exceptionable passages in the Furioso were found crossed out with a pen in a manuscript copy of the author, showing his intention to have suppressed them at some future period. The fact does not appear probable, since the edition as it now stands, with all its original blemishes, was revised and published by himself the year of his death.

Tasso possessed a deeper, a more abstracted and lyrical turn of thought. Ariosto infuses an active worldly spirit into his poetry; his beauties are social, while those of his rival are rather of a solitary complexion. Ariosto's muse seems to have

Those he desired in vain, new torments been
Augmented thus with wish of comforts old;
Those waters cool he drank in vain conceit,
Which more increased his thirst, increased his heat."—FAIRFAX.

caught the gossiping spirit of the *fabliaux*, and Tasso's the lyrical refinements of the *Provençal*. Ariosto is seldom sublime like the other. This may be imputed to his subject, as well as to the character of his genius. Owing to his subject, he is more generally entertaining. The easy freedom of his narrative often leads him into natural details much more affecting than the ideal generalization of Tasso. How pathetic is the dying scene of Brandimarte, with the half-finished name of his mistress, Fiordiligi, upon his lip:

> "Orlando, fa che ti raccordi
> Di me nell' orazion tue grate a Dio;
> Nè men ti raccomando la mia Fiordi . . . .
> Ma dir non poté *ligi;* e qui finío." *

Tasso could never have descended to this beautiful negligence of expression.†

Tasso challenged a comparison with his predecessor in his gardens of Armida. The indolent and languishing repose of the one, the brisk, amorous excitement of the other, are in some measure characteristic of their different pencils. The parallel has been too often pursued for us to weary our readers with it.

* "Orlando, I implore thee
That in thy prayers my name may be commended,
And to thy care I leave my loved *Fiordi*—
Ligi he could not add; but here he ended."

† The *ideal*, which we have imputed to Tasso, may be cited, however, as a characteristic of the national literature, and as the point in which their literature is most decidedly opposed to our own. With the exception of Dante and Parini, whose copies from life have all the precision of proof-impressions, it would be difficult to find a picture in the compass of Italian poetry executed with the fidelity

The Italians have a copious variety of narrative poetry, and are very nice in their subdivisions of it. Without attending to these, we have been guided by its chronological succession. We have hardly room to touch upon the "Secchia Rapita" ("Rape of the Bucket") of Tassoni, the model of the mock-heroic poems afterwards frequent in Italy,* of Boileau's "Lutrin," and of the "Rape of the Lock." Tassoni, its author, was a learned and noble Modenese, who, after a life passed in the heats of literary controversies, to which he had himself given rise, died 1635, aged seventy-one. The subject of the poem is a war between Modena and Bologna, at the commencement of the thirteenth century, in consequence of a wooden bucket having been carried off from the market-place in the latter city by an invading party of

to nature so observable in our good authors, so apparent in every page of Cowper or Thomson, for example. It might be well, perhaps, for the English artist, if he could embellish the minute and literal details of his own school with some of the ideal graces of the Italian. Byron may be considered as having done this more effectually than any contemporary poet. Byron's love of the ideal, it must be allowed, however, has too often bewildered him in mysticism and hyperbole.

* The Italians long disputed with great acrimony whether this or the comic-heroic poem of Bracciolini (*Lo Scherno degli Dei*) was precedent in point of age. It appears probable that Tassoni's was written first, although printed last. No country has been half so fruitful as Italy in literary quarrels, and in none have they been pursued with such bitterness and pertinacity. In some instances, as in that of Marini, they have even been maintained by assassination. The sarcastic commentaries of Galileo upon the "Jerusalem," quoted in the vulgar edition of the "Classics," were found sadly mutilated by one of the offended *Tassisti*, into whose hands they had fallen more than two centuries after they were written; so long does a literary faction last in Italy! The Italians, inhibited from a free discussion on political or religious topics, entered with incredible zeal into those of a purely abstract and often unimportant character.

the former. This memorable trophy has been preserved down to the present day in the cathedral of Modena. Tassoni's epic will confer upon it a more lasting existence.

"The Bucket, which so sorely had offended,
In the Great Tower, where yet it may be found,
Was from on high by ponderous chain suspended,
And with a marble cope environ'd round.
By portals five the entrance is defended;
Nor cavalier of note is that way bound,
Nor pious pilgrim, but doth pause to see
The spoil so glorious of the victory."—Canto i., st. 63.

Gironi, in his life of the poet, triumphantly adduces, in evidence of the superiority of the Italian epic over the French mock-heroic poem of Boileau, that the subject of the former is far more insignificant than that of the latter, and yet the poem has twelve cantos, being twice the number of the Lutrin. He might have added that each canto contains about six hundred lines instead of two hundred, the average complement of the French, so that Tassoni's epic has the glory of being twelve times as long as Boileau's, and all about a bucket! This is somewhat characteristic of the Italians. What other people would good-humoredly endure such an interminable epic upon so trivial an affair, which had taken place more than four centuries before? To make amends, however, for the want of pungency in a satire on transactions of such an antiquated date, Tassoni has besprinkled his poem very liberally with allusions to living characters.

We may make one general objection to the poem, that it is often too much in earnest for the

perfect keeping of the mock-heroic. The cutting of throats and fighting regular pitched battles are too bloody a business for a joke. How much more in the genuine spirit of this species of poetry is the bloodless battle with the books in the Lutrin!

The machinery employed by Tassoni is composed of the ancient heathen deities. These are frequently brought upon the stage, and are travestied with the coarsest comic humor. But the burlesque which reduces great things to little is of a grosser and much less agreeable sort than that which magnifies little things into great. The "Rape of the Lock" owes its charms to the latter process. The importance which it gives to the elegant nothings of high life, its perpetual sparkling of wit, the fairy fretwork which constitutes its machinery, have made it superior, as a fine piece of irony, to either of its foreign rivals. A Frenchman would doubtless prefer the epic regularity, progressive action, and smooth seesaw versification of the Lutrin;* while an Italian would find sufficient in the grand heroic sentiment and the voluptuous portraiture with which Tassoni's unequal poem is occasionally inlaid, to justify his preference of it. There is no accounting for national taste. La Harpe, the Aristarchus of French critics, censures the gossamer *machinery* of the "Rape of the Lock" as the greatest defect in the poem. "La fable des Sylphes, que Pope a très-

* The versification of the Lutrin is esteemed as faultless as any in the language. The tame and monotonous flow of the best of French rhyme, however, produces an effect, at least upon a foreign ear, which has been well likened by one of their own nation to "the drinking of cold water."

inutilement empruntée du Conte de Gabalis, pour en faire le merveilleux de son poëme, n'y produit *rien d'agréable, rien d'intéressant!*"

Italy, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was inundated with crude and insipid romances, distributed into all the varieties of epic poetry. The last one, however, of sufficient importance to require our notice, namely, the *Ricciardetto* of Nicholas Fortiguerra, appeared as late as 1738. After two centuries of marvellous romance, Charlemagne and his paladins became rather insipid *dramatis personæ*. What could not be handled seriously, however, might be ridiculed; and the smile half suppressed by Ariosto and Berni broke out into broad buffoonery in the poem of Fortiguerra.

The *Ricciardetto* may be considered the Don Quixote of Italy; for although it did not bring about that revolution in the national taste ascribed to the Spanish romance, yet it is, like that, an unequivocal parody upon the achievements of knight-errantry. It may be doubted whether Don Quixote itself was not the consequence rather than the cause of the revolution in the national taste. Fortiguerra pursued an opposite method to Cervantes, and, instead of introducing his crack-brained heroes into the realities of vulgar life, he made them equally ridiculous by involving them in the most absurd caricatures of romantic fiction. Many of these adventures are of a licentious, and sometimes of a disgusting, nature; but the graceful though negligent beauties of his style throw an illusive veil over the grossness of the narrative.

Imitations of Pulci may be more frequently traced than of any other romantic poet. But, although more celebrated writers are occasionally, and the extravagances of chivalry are perpetually, parodied by Fortiguerra, yet his object does not seem to have been deliberate satire so much as good-humored jesting. What he wrote was for the simple purpose of raising a laugh, not for the derision or the correction of the taste of his countrymen. The tendency of his poem is certainly satirical, yet there is not a line indicating such an intention on his part. The most pointed humor is aimed at the clergy.* Fortiguerra was himself a canon. He commenced his epic at the suggestion of some friends with whom he was passing a few weeks of the autumn at a hunting-seat. The conversation turned upon the labor bestowed by Pulci, Berni, and Ariosto on their great poems; and Fortiguerra undertook to furnish, the next day, a canto of good poetry exhibiting some of the peculiarities of their respective styles. He fulfilled his promise, and his friends, delighted with its sprightly graces, persuaded him to pursue

* One of the leading characters is Ferragus, who had figured in all the old epics as one of the most formidable Saracen chieftains. He turns hermit with Fortiguerra, and beguiles his lonely winter evenings with the innocent pastime of making candles:

"E ne l'orrida bruma,
Quando l'aria è piu fredda, e piu crudele,
Io mi diverto in far delle candele."—iii. 53.

A contrast highly diverting to the Italians, who had been taught to associate very lofty ideas with the name of Ferragus. The conflict kept up between the devout scruples of the new saint and his old heathen appetites affords perpetual subjects for the profane comi.

the epic to its present complement of thirty cantos. Any one acquainted with the facilities for improvisation afforded by the flexible organization of the Italian tongue will be the less surprised at the rapidity of this composition. The "Ricciardetto" may be looked upon as a sort of improvisation.

In the following literal version of the two opening stanzas of the poem we have attempted to convey some notion of the sportive temper of the original:

"It will not let my busy brain alone;
The whim has taken me to write a tale,
In poetry, of things till now unknown,
Or if not wholly new, yet nothing stale.
My muse is not a daughter of the Sun,
With harp of gold and ebony; a hale
And buxom country lass, she sports at ease,
And, free as air, sings to the passing breeze.

"Yet, though accustom'd to the wood,—its spring
Her only beverage, and her food its mast—
She will of heroes and of battles sing,
The loves and high emprizes of the past.
Then, if she falter on so bold a wing,
Light be the blame upon her errors cast;
She never studied; and she well may err,
Whose home hath been beneath the oak and fir."

Fortiguerra's introductions to his cantos are seasoned with an extremely pleasant wit, which Lord Byron has attentively studied, and, in some passages of his more familiar poetry, closely imitated. The stanza, for example, in Beppo, beginning

"She was not old, nor young, nor at the years
Which certain people call a *certain age*,
Which yet the most uncertain age appears," etc.,

was evidently suggested by the following in "Ricciardetto:"

"Quando si giugne ad una *certa età*,
Ch'io non voglio descrivervi qual è,
Bisogna stare allora a quel ch'un ha,
Nè d'altro amante provar più la fè,
Perchè, donne me care, la beltà
Ha l' ali al capo, alle spalle, ed a' piè;
E vola si, che non si scorge più
Vestigio alcun ne' visi, dove fu."

Byron's wit, however, is pointed with a keener sarcasm, and his serious reflections show a finer perception both of natural and moral beauty, than belong to the Italian. No two things are more remote from each other than sentiment and satire. In "Don Juan" they are found side by side in almost every stanza. The effect is disagreeable. The heart, warmed by some picture of extreme beauty or pathos, is suddenly chilled by a selfish sneer, a cold-blooded maxim, that makes you ashamed of having been duped into a good feeling by the writer even for a moment. It is a melancholy reflection that the last work of this extraordinary poet should be the monument alike of his genius and his infamy. Voltaire's licentious epic, the "Pucelle," is written in a manner, perhaps, more nearly corresponding to that of the Italian; but the philosophical irony, if we may so call it, which forms the substratum of the more familiar compositions of this witty and profligate author is of somewhat too deep a cast for the light, superficial banter of Fortiguerra.

We have now traced the course of Italian narrative poetry down to the middle of the last cen-

tury. It has by no means become extinct since that period, and, among others, an author well known here by his history of our Revolutionary War has contributed his share to the epopee of his country, in his "Camillo, o Vejo Conquistata." Almost every Italian writer has a poetic vein within him, which, if it does not find a vent in sonnets or canzones, will flow out into more formidable compositions.*

In glancing over the long range of Italian narrative poems, one may be naturally led to the reflection that the most prolific branch of the national literature is devoted *exclusively* to purposes of mere amusement. Brilliant inventions, delicate humor, and a beautiful coloring of language are lavished upon all; but, with the exception of the "Jerusalem," we rarely meet with sublime or ennobling sentiment, and very rarely with any thing like a moral or philosophical purpose. Madame de Staël has attempted to fasten a reproach on the whole body of Italian letters, "that, with the exception of their works on physical science, they have never been directed to *utility*."† The imputation applied in this almost unqualified manner is unjust. The language has been enriched by the valuable reflections of too many historians, the solid labors of too many antiquaries and critics, to be thus lightly desig-

* Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Bembo, Varchi, Castiglione, Pignotti, Botta, and a host of other *classic* prose writers of Italy, have all confessed the "impetus sacer," and given birth to epics, lyrics, or bucolics.

† "Tous les ouvrages des Italiens, excepté ceux qui traitent des sciences physiques, n'ont jamais pour but l'utilité." De la Littérature, etc.

nated. The learned lady may have found a model for her own comprehensive manner of philosophizing, and an ample refutation of her assertion, in Machiavelli alone.* In their works of imagination, however, such an imputation appears to be well merited. The Italians seem to demand from these nothing farther than from a fine piece of music, where the heart is stirred, the ear soothed, but the understanding not a whit refreshed. The splendid apparitions of their poet's fancy fade away from the mind of the reader, and, like the enchanted fabrics described in their romances, leave not a trace behind them.

In the works of fancy in our language, fiction is almost universally made subservient to more important and nobler purposes. The ancient drama, and novels, the modern prose drama, exhibit historical pictures of manners and accurate delineations of character. Most of the English poets in other walks, from the "moral Gower" to Cowper, Crabbe, and Wordsworth, have made their verses the elegant vehicles of religious or practical truth. Even descriptive poetry in England interprets the silence of external nature into

* We say *manner*, not spirit. The "Discorsi sopra T. Livio," however, require less qualification on the score of their principles. They obviously furnished the model to the "Grandeur et Décadence des Romains," and the same extended philosophy which Montesquieu imitated in civil history, Madame de Staël has carried into literary. Among the historians, antiquaries, etc., whose names are known where the language is not read, we might cite Guicciardini, Bembo, Sarpi, Giannone, Nardi, Davila, Denina, Muratori, Tiraboschi, Gravina, Bettinelli, Algarotti, Beccaria, Filangieri, Cesarotti, Pignotti, and many others; a hollow muster-roll of names, that it would be somewhat ridiculous to run over did not their wide celebrity expose in a stronger light Madame de Staël's sweeping assertion.

a language of sentiment and devotion. It is characteristic of this spirit in the nation that Spenser, the only one of their classic writers who has repeated the fantastic legends of chivalry, deemed it necessary to veil his Italian fancy in a cloud of allegory, which, however it may be thought to affect the poem, shows unequivocally the didactic intention of the poet.

These grave and extended views are seldom visible in the ornamental writing of the Italians. It rarely conveys useful information or inculcates moral or practical truth; but it is too commonly an elegant, unprofitable pastime. Novelle, lyrical and epic poetry may be considered as constituting three principal streams of their lighter literature. These have continued to flow, with little interruption, the two first from the "golden urns" of Petrarch and Boccaccio, the last from the early sources we have already traced down to the present day. Their multitudinous novelle, with all their varieties of tragic and comic incident, the last by far the most frequent, present few just portraitures of character, still fewer examples of sound ethics or wise philosophy.* In the exuberance of their sonnets and canzone, we find some, it is true, animated by an efficient spirit of religion or patriotism; but too frequently they are of a purely amatory nature, the unsubstantial though brilliant

* The heavier charge of indecency lies upon many. The Novelle of Casti, published as late as 1804, make the foulest tales of Boccaccio appear fair beside them. They have run through several editions since their first appearance, and it tells not well for the land that a numerous class of readers can be found in it who take delight in banqueting upon such abominable offal.

exhalations of a heated fancy. The pastoral drama, the opera, and other beautiful varieties of invention, which, under the titles of Bernesco, Burlesco, Maccherónico, and the like, have been nicely classed according to their different modifications of style and humor, while they manifest the mercurial temper and the originality of the nation, confirm the justice of our position.

The native melody of the Italian tongue, by seducing their writers into an overweening attention to sound, has doubtless been in one sense prejudicial to their literature. We do not mean to imply, in conformity with a vulgar opinion, that the language is deficient in energy or compactness. Its harmony is no proof of its weakness. It allows more licenses of contraction than any other European tongue, and retains more than any other the vigorous inversions of its Latin original. Dante is the most concise of early moderns, and we know none superior to Alfieri in this respect among those of our own age. Davanzati's literal translation of Tacitus is condensed into a smaller compass than its original, the most sententious of ancient histories; but still the silver tones of a language that almost sets itself to music as it is spoken must have an undue attraction for the harmonious ear of an Italian. Their very first classical model of prose composition is an obvious example of it.

The frequency of *improvisation* is another circumstance that has naturally tended to introduce a less serious and thoughtful habit of composition. Above all, the natural perceptions of an Italian

seem to be peculiarly sensible to *beauty*, independent of every other quality. Any one who has been in Italy must have recognized the glimpses of a pure taste through the rags of the meanest beggar. The musical pieces, when first exhibited at the theatre of San Carlo, are correctly pronounced upon by the lazzaroni of Naples, and the mob of Florence decide with equal accuracy upon the productions of their immortal school. Cellini tells us that he exposed his celebrated statue of Perseus in the public square by order of his patron, Duke Cosmo First, who declared himself perfectly satisfied with it on learning the commendations of the people.* It is not extraordinary that this exquisite sensibility to the beautiful should have also influenced them in literary art, and have led them astray sometimes from the substantial and the useful. Who but an Italian historian would, in this practical age, so far blend fact and fiction as, for the sake of rhetorical effect, to introduce into the mouths of his personages sentiments and speeches never uttered by them, as Botta has lately done in his history of the American War?

In justice, however, to the Italians, we must admit that the reproach incurred by too concentrated an attention to beauty, to the exclusion of more enlarged and useful views, in their lighter compositions, does not fall upon this or the last century. They have imbibed a graver and more philosophical cast of reflection, for which they seem partly indebted to the influence of English literature. Several of their most eminent authors

* Vita di Benvenuto Cellini, tom. ii. p. 339.

have either visited or resided in Great Britain, and the genius of the language has been made known through the medium of skilful translations. Alfieri has transported into his tragedies the solemn spirit and vigorous characterization peculiar to the English. He somewhere remarks that "he could not read the language;" but we are persuaded his stern pen would never have traced the dying scene of Saul had he not witnessed a representation of Macbeth. Ippolito Pindemonte, in his descriptive pieces, has deepened the tones of his native idiom with the moral melancholy of Gray and Cowper. Monti's compositions, both dramatic and miscellaneous, bear frequent testimony to his avowed admiration for Shakspeare; and Cesarotti, Foscolo, and Pignotti have introduced the "severer muses" of the North to a still wider and more familiar acquaintance with their countrymen.* Lastly, among the works of fancy which attest the practical scope of Italian letters in the last century, we must not omit the "Giorno" of Parini, the most curious and nicely-elaborated specimen of *didactic* satire produced in any age or country. Its polished irony, pointed at the domestic vices of the Italian nobility, indicates both the profligacy of the nation and the moral independence of the poet.

* Both the prose and poetry of Foscolo are pregnant with more serious meditation and warmer patriotism than is usual in the works of the Italians. Pignotti, although his own national manner has been but little affected by his foreign erudition, has contributed more than any other to extend the influence of English letters among his countrymen. His works abound in allusions to them, and two of his principal poems are dedicated to the memory of Shakespeare and of Pope.

The Italian language, the first-born of those descended from the Latin, is also the most beautiful. It is not surprising that a people endowed with an exquisite sensibility to beauty should have been often led to regard this language rather as a means of pleasure than of utility. We must not, however, so far yield to the unqualified imputation of Madame de Staël as to forget that they have other claims to our admiration than what arise from the inventions of the poet, or from the ideal beauties which they have revived of Grecian art; that the light of *genius* shed upon the world in the fourteenth, and that of *learning* in the fifteenth century, was all derived from Italy; that her writers first unfolded the sublimity of Christian doctrines as applied to modern literature, and by their patient philological labors restored to life the buried literature of antiquity; that her schools revived and expounded the ancient code of law, since become the basis of so important a branch of jurisprudence both in Europe and our own country; that she *originated* literary, and brought to a perfection unequalled in any other language, unless it be our own, civil and political, history; that she led the way in physical science and in that of political philosophy; and, finally, that of the two enlightened navigators who divide the glory of adding a new quarter to the globe, the one was a Genoese and the other a Florentine.

In following down the stream of Italian narrative poetry, we have wandered into so many details, especially where they would tend to throw

light on the intellectual character of the nation, that we have little room, and our readers, doubtless, less patience, left for a discussion of the poems which form the text of our article. The few stanzas descriptive of Berni, which we have borrowed from the Innamorato, may give some notion of Mr. Rose's manner. The translations have been noticed in several of the English journals, and we perfectly accord with the favorable opinion of them which has been so often expressed that it needs not here be repeated.

The composite style of Ariosto owes its charms to the skill with which the delicate tints of his irony are mixed with the sober coloring of his narrative. His translators have spoiled the harmony of the composition by overcharging one or other of these ingredients. Harrington has caricatured his original into burlesque; Hoole has degraded him into a most melancholy proser. The popularity of this latter version has been of infinite disservice to the fame of Ariosto, whose aerial fancy loses all its buoyancy under the heavy hexameters of the English translator. The purity of Mr. Rose's taste has prevented him from exaggerating even the beauties of his original.

POETRY AND ROMANCE OF THE ITALIANS *

(July, 1831)

IT is not our intention to go into an analysis, or even to discuss the merits, of the works at the head of this article, which we have selected only as a text for such reflections on the poetry and ornamental prose-writing of the Italians as might naturally suggest themselves to an English reader. The points of view from which a native contemplates his own literature and those from which it is seen by a foreigner are so dissimilar that it would be hardly possible that they should come precisely to the same results without affectation or servility on the part of the latter. The native, indeed, is far better qualified than any foreigner can be to estimate the productions of his own countrymen; but, as each is subjected to peculiar influences, truth may be more likely to be elicited from a collision of their mutual opinions than from those exclusively of either.

* [The reader may find in this article some inadvertent repetitions of what had been said in two articles written some years before, and covering, in part, the same ground.]

1. "Della Letteratura Italiana, di Camillo Ugoni." 3 tom. 12mo. Brescia, 1820.

2. "Storia della Letteratura Italiana, del cavaliere Giuseppe Maffei." 3 tom. 12mo. Milano, 1825.

3. "Storia della Letteratura Italiana nel Secolo XVIII., di Antonio Lombardi." 3 tom. 8vo. Modena, 1827–29.

The Italian, although the first modern tongue to produce what still endure as classical models of composition, was, of all the Romance dialects, the last to be applied to literary purposes. The poem of the Cid, which, with all its rawness, exhibits the frank bearing of the age in a highly poetic aspect, was written nearly a century previously to this event. The northern French, which even some Italian scholars of that day condescended to employ as the most popular vehicle of thought, had been richly cultivated, indemnifying itself in anticipation, as it were, by this extraordinary precocity, for the poetic sterility with which it has been cursed ever since. In the South, and along the shores of the Mediterranean, every remote corner was alive with the voice of song. A beautiful poetry had ripened into perfection there, and nearly perished, before the first lispings of the Italian muse were heard, not in her own land, but at the court of a foreigner, in Sicily. The poets of Lombardy wrote in the Provençal. The histories—and almost every city had its historian, and some two or three—were composed in Latin, or in some half-formed, discordant dialect of the country. "The Italian of that age," says Tiraboschi, "more nearly resembled the Latin than the Tuscan does now any of her sister dialects." It seemed doubtful which of the conflicting idioms would prevail, when a mighty genius arose, who, collecting the scattered elements together, formed one of those wonderful creations which make an epoch in the history of civilization, and forever fixed the destinies of his language.

We shall not trouble our readers with a particular criticism on so popular a work as the Divine Comedy, but confine ourselves to a few such desultory observations as have been suggested on a reperusal of it. The Inferno is more frequently quoted and eulogized than any other portion of the Commedia. It exhibits a more marked progress of the action, and, while it affects us by its deepened pictures of misery, it owes, no doubt, something to the piquant personalities which have to this day not entirely lost their relish. Notwithstanding this, it by no means displays the whole of its author's intellectual power, and so very various are the merits of the different portions of his epic that one who has not read the whole may be truly said not to have read Dante. The poet has borrowed the hints for his punishments partly from ancient mythology, partly from the metaphorical denunciations of Scripture, but principally from his own inexhaustible fancy; and he has adapted them to the specific crimes with a truly frightful ingenuity. We could wish that he had made more use of the mind as a means of torture, and thus given a finer moral coloring to the picture. This defect is particularly conspicuous in his portraiture of Satan, who, far different from that spirit whose form had not yet lost all her original brightness, is depicted in the gross and superstitious terrors of a childish imagination. This decidedly bad taste must be imputed to the rudeness of the age in which Dante lived. The progress of refinement is shown in Tasso's subsequent portrait of this same personage, who,

" towering like Carpe or huge Atlas," is sustained by that unconquerable temper which gives life to the yet more spiritualized conceptions of Milton. The faults of Dante were those of his age; but in his elevated conceptions, in the wild and desolating gloom which he has thrown around the city of the dead, the world saw, for the first time, the genius of modern literature fully displayed; and in his ripe and vigorous versification it beheld also, for the first time, the poetical capacities of a modern idiom.*

The Purgatory relies for its interest on no strong emotion, but on a contemplative moral tone, and on such luxuriant descriptions of nature as bring it much nearer to the style of English poetry than any other part of the work. It is on the Paradise, however, that Dante has lavished all the stores of his fancy. Yet he has not succeeded in his attempt to exhibit there a regular gradation of happiness; for happiness cannot, like pain, be measured by any scale of physical sensations. Neither is he always successful in the notions which he has conveyed of the occupations of the blessed. There was no source whence he could derive this knowledge. The Scriptures present no determinate idea of such occupations, and the mythology of the ancients had so little that was consolatory in it, even to themselves, that the shade of Achilles is made to say, in the Odyssey, that " he had rather

* Dante anticipated the final triumph of the Italian with a generous confidence not shared by the more timid scholars of his own or the succeeding age. See his eloquent apology for it in his Convito, especially pp. 81, 82, tom. iv. ed. 1758. See, also, Purgatorio, canto xxiv.

DANTE AND BEATRICE.

be the slave of the meanest living man than rule as a sovereign among the dead."

Dante wisely placed the moral sources of happiness in the exercises of the mind. The most agreeable of these to himself, though, perhaps, to few of his readers, was metaphysical polemics. He had, unfortunately, in his youth gained a prize for successful disputation at the schools; and in every page of these gladiatorial exhibitions we discern the disciple of Scotus and Aquinas. His *matériel* is made up of light, music, and motion. These he has arranged in every possible variety of combination. We are borne along from one magnificent *fête* to another, and, as we rise in the scale of being, the motion of the celestial dance increases in velocity, the light shines with redoubled brilliancy, and the music is of a more ravishing sweetness, until all is confounded in the intolerable splendors of the Deity.

Dante has failed in his attempt to personify the Deity. Who, indeed, has not? No such personification can be effected without the aid of illustration from physical objects; and how degrading are these to our conceptions of Omnipotence! The repeated failures of the Italians who have attempted this in the arts of design are still more conspicuous. Even the genius of Raphael has only furnished another proof of the impotence of his art. The advancement of taste may be again seen in Tasso's representation of the Supreme Being by his attributes;* and, with similar discretion, Milton, like the Grecian artist who

* Gerusalemme Liberata, c. ix., s. 56.

drew a mantle over the countenance which he could not trust himself to paint, whenever he has introduced the Deity has veiled his glories in a cloud.

The characters and conditions of Dante and Milton were too analogous not to have often invited the parallel. Both took an active part in the revolutions of their age; both lived to see the extinction of their own hopes and the ruin of their party; and it was the fate of both to compose their immortal poems in poverty and disgrace. These circumstances, however, produced different effects on their minds. Milton in solitude and darkness, from the cheerful ways of men cut off, was obliged to seek inwardly that celestial light which, as he pathetically laments, was denied to him from without. Hence his poem breathes a spirit of lofty contemplation, which is never disturbed by the impurities that disfigure the page of Dante. The latter poet, an exile in a foreign land, condemned to eat the bread of dependence from the hands of his ancient enemies, felt the iron enter more deeply into his soul, and, in the spirit of his age, has too often made his verses the vehicle of his vindictive scorn. Both stood forth the sturdy champions of freedom in every form, above all, of intellectual freedom. The same spirit which animates the controversial writings of Milton glows with yet fiercer heat in every page of the Divine Comedy. How does its author denounce the abuses, the crying abuses, of the Church, its hypocrisies and manifold perversions of Scripture! How boldly does he declare his determination to proclaim the truth, that he may live in the memory of the just here-

after! His Ghibelline connections were indeed unfavorable to these principles; but these connections were the result of necessity, not of choice. His hardy spirit had been nursed in the last stages of the republic; and it may be truly said of him that he became a Ghibelline in the hope of again becoming a Florentine. The love of his native soil, as with most exiles, was a vital principle with him. How pathetically does he recall those good old times when the sons of Florence were sure to find a grave within her walls! Even the bitterness of his heart against her, which breaks forth in the very courts of heaven, proves, paradoxical as it may appear, the tenacity of his affection. It might not be easy to rouse the patriotism of a modern Italian even into this symptom of vitality.

The genius of both was of the severest kind. For this reason, any display of their sensibility, like the light breaking through a dark cloud, affects us the more by contrast. Such are the sweet pictures of domestic bliss in Paradise Lost, and the tender tale of Francesca da Rimini in the Inferno. Both are sublime in the highest signification of the term; but Milton is an ideal poet, and delights in generalization, while Dante is the most literal of artists, and paints every thing in detail. He refuses no imagery, however mean, that can illustrate his subject. This is too notorious to require exemplification. He is, moreover, eminently distinguished by the power of depicting his thought by a single vigorous touch,—a manner well known in Italy under the name of *Dantesque*. It would not be easy for such a verse as the following, without

sacrifice of idiom, to be condensed within the same compass in our language:

"Con viso, che tacendo dicea, taci."

It would be interesting to trace the similarity of tastes in these great minds, as exhibited in their pleasures equally with their serious pursuits; in their exquisite sensibility to music; in their early fondness for those ancient romances which they have so often celebrated both in prose and verse; but our limits will not allow us to pursue the subject farther.

Dante's epic was greeted by his countrymen in that rude age with the general enthusiasm with which they have ever welcomed the works of genius. A chair was instituted at Florence for the exposition of the Divine Comedy, and Boccaccio was the first who filled it. The bust of its author was crowned with laurels; his daughter was maintained at the public expense; and the fickle Florentines vainly solicited from Ravenna the ashes of their poet, whom they had so bitterly persecuted when living.

Notwithstanding all this, the father of Italian verse has had a much less sensible influence on the taste of his countrymen than either of the illustrious triumvirate of the fourteenth century. His bold, masculine diction and his concentrated thought were ill suited to the effeminacy of his nation. One or two clumsy imitators of him appeared in his own age; and in ours a school has been formed, professing to be modelled on the

severe principles of the *trecentisti;* but no one has yet arisen to bend the bow of Ulysses.

Several poets wrote in the Tuscan or Italian dialect at the close of the thirteenth century with tolerable purity; but their amorous effusions would probably, like those in the Provençal, have rapidly passed into oblivion had the language not been consecrated by some established work of genius like the Divina Commedia. It was fortunate that its author selected a subject which enabled him to exhibit the peculiar tendency of Christianity and of modern institutions, and to demonstrate their immense superiority for poetical purposes over those of antiquity. It opened a cheering prospect to those who doubted the capacities of a modern idiom; and, after ages of barbarism, it was welcomed as the sign that the waters had at length passed from the face of the earth.

We have been detained long upon Dante, though somewhat contrary to our intention of discussing classes rather than individuals, from the circumstance that he constitutes in himself, if we may so say, an entire and independent class. We shall now proceed, as concisely as possible, to touch upon some of the leading peculiarities in the lyrical poetry of the Italians, which forms with them a very important branch of letters.

Lyrical poetry is more immediately the offspring of imagination, or of deep feeling, than any other kind of verse, and there can be little chance of reaching to high excellence in it among a nation whose character is defective in these qualities. The Italians are, undoubtedly, the most pro-

lific in this department, as the French are the least so, of any people in Europe. Nothing can be more mechanical than a French ode. Reason, wit, pedantry, any thing but inspiration, find their way into it; and when the poet is in extremity, like the countryman in the fable, he calls upon the pagan gods of antiquity to help him out. The best ode in the language, according to La Harpe, is that of J. B. Rousseau on the Count de Luc, in which Phœbus, or the Fates, Pluto, Ceres, or Cybele, figure in every stanza. There is little of the genuine *impetus sacer* in all this. Lyrical compositions, the expression of natural sensibility, are generally most abundant in the earlier periods of a nation's literature. Such are the beautiful collections of rural minstrelsy in our own tongue, and the fine old ballads and songs in the Castilian; which last have had the advantage over ours of being imitated down to a late day by their most polished writers. But Italy is the only country in which lyrical composition, from the first, instead of assuming a plebeian garb, has received all the perfection of literary finish, and which, amid every vicissitude of taste, has been cultivated by the most polished writers of the age.

One cause of this is to be found in the circumstances and peculiar character of the father of Italian song. The life of Petrarch furnishes the most brilliant example of the triumph of letters in a country where literary celebrity has been often the path to political consequence. Princes and pontiffs, cities and universities, vied with each other in lavishing honors upon him. His tour

through Italy was a sort of royal progress, the inhabitants of the cities thronging out to meet him, and providing a residence for him at the public expense.

The two most enlightened capitals in Europe contended with each other for the honor of his poetical coronation. His influence was solicited in the principal negotiations of the Italian States, and he enjoyed at the same time the confidence of the ferocious Visconti and the accomplished Robert of Naples. His immense correspondence connected him with the principal characters, both literary and political, throughout Europe, and his personal biography may be said to constitute the history of his age.

It must be confessed that the heart of Petrarch was not insensible to this universal homage, and that his writings occasionally betray the vanity and caprice which indicate the spoiled child of fortune; but, with this moderate alloy of humanity, his general deportment exhibits a purity of principle and a generous elevation of sentiment far above the degenerate politics of his time. He was, indeed, the first in an age of servility, as Dante had been the last in an age of freedom. If he was intimate with some of the petty tyrants of Lombardy, he never prostituted his genius to the vindication of their vices. His political negotiations were conducted with the most generous and extended views for the weal of all Italy. How independently did he remonstrate with Dandolo on his war with the Genoese! How did he lift his voice against the lawless banditti who, as foreign

mercenaries, ravaged the fair plains of Lombardy! How boldly, to a degree which makes it difficult to account for his personal safety, did he thunder his invectives against the western Babylon!

Even his failings were those of a generous nature. Dwelling much of his time at a distance from his native land, he considered himself rather as a citizen of Italy than of any particular district of it. He contemplated her with the eye of an ancient Roman, and wished to see the Imperial City once more resume her supremacy among the nations. This led him for a moment to give in to the brilliant illusion of liberty which Rienzi awakened. "Who would not," he says, appealing to the Romans, "rather die a freeman than live a slave?" * But when he saw that he had been deceived, he did not attempt to conceal his indignation, and, in an animated expostulation with the tribune, he admonishes him that he is the minister, not the master, of the republic, and that treachery to one's country is a crime which nothing can expiate.†

As he wandered amid the ruins of Rome, he contemplated with horror the violation of her venerable edifices, and he called upon the pontiffs to return to the protection of their "widowed metropolis." He was, above all, solicitous for the recovery of the intellectual treasures of antiquity, sparing no expense or personal fatigue in this cause. Many of the mouldering manuscripts he restored or copied with his own hand; and his

* Epist. ad Nic. Laurentii: Opera, p. 535.
† Famil. Epist., lib. vii. ep. 7, p. 677, Basil ed.

beautiful transcript of the epistles of Cicero is still to be seen in the Laurentian Library at Florence.

The influence of this example is visible in the generous emulation for letters kindled throughout Italy, and in the purer principles of taste which directed the studies of the schools.* His extensive correspondence diffused to the remotest corners of Europe the sacred flame which glowed so brightly in his own bosom; and it may be truly said that he possessed an intellectual empire such as was never before enjoyed, and probably never can be again, in the comparatively high state of civilization to which the world is arrived.

It is not, however, the antiquarian researches of Petrarch, nor those elaborate Latin compositions which secured to him the laurel wreath of poetry in the capitol, that have kept his memory still green in the hearts of his countrymen, but those humbler effusions in his own language, which he did not even condescend to mention in his Letter to Posterity, and which he freely gave away as alms to ballad-singers. It was auspicious for Italian literature that a poet like Dante should have been followed by one of so flexible a character as Petrarch. It was beauty succeeding vigor. The language to which Dante had given all its compactness and energy was far from having

* In Florence, for example, with a population which Villani, at the middle of the fourteenth century, reckons at ninety thousand souls, there were from eight to ten thousand children who received a liberal education (Istor. Fiorent., lib. xi. cap. 93), at a time when the higher classes in the rest of Europe were often uninstructed in the elementary principles of knowledge.

reached the full harmony of numbers of which it was capable. He had, moreover, occasionally distorted it into such Latinized inversions, uncouth phrases, Hebraisms and Grecisms, as were foreign to the genius of the tongue. These blemishes, of so little account in Dante's extensive poem, would have been fatal to the lyrical pieces of Petrarch, which like miniatures, from their minuteness, demand the highest finish of detail. The pains which the latter poet bestowed on the correction of his verses are almost inconceivable. Some of them would appear, from the memoranda which he has left, to have been submitted to the file for weeks, nay, months, before he dismissed them. Nor was this fastidiousness of taste frivolous in one who was correcting not for himself but for posterity, and who, in these peculiar graces of style, was creating beautiful and permanent forms of expression for his countrymen. His acquaintance with the modern dialects, especially the Spanish and the Provençal, enriched his vocabulary with many exotic beauties. His fine ear disposed him to refuse all but the most harmonious combinations of sound. He was accustomed to try the melody of his verses by the lute, and, like the fabled Theban, built up its elegant fabric by the charms of music. By these means he created a style scarcely more antiquated than that of the present day, and which can hardly be said to contain an obsolete phrase; an assertion not to be ventured respecting any author in our language before the days of Queen Anne. Indeed, even a foreigner can hardly open a page of Petrarch without being struck with the

PORTRAIT OF PETRARCH.

precocity of a language which, like the vegetation of an arctic summer, seems to have ripened into full maturity at once. There is nothing analogous to this in any other tongue with which we are acquainted, unless it be the Greek, which, in the poems of Homer, appears to have attained its last perfection; a circumstance which has led Cicero to remark, in his Brutus, that "there must, doubtless, have existed poets antecedent to Homer, since invention and perfection can hardly go together."

The mass of Petrarch's Italian poetry is, as is well known, of an amorous complexion. He was naturally of a melancholy temperament, and his unfortunate passion became with him the animating principle of being. His compositions in the Latin, as well as those in the vulgar tongue, his voluminous correspondence, his private memoranda or confessions, which, from their nature, seem never to have been destined for the public eye, all exhibit this passion in one shape or another. Yet there have been those who have affected to doubt even the existence of such a personage as Laura.

His Sonnets and Canzoni, chronologically arranged, exhibit pretty fairly the progress of his life and love, and, as such, have been judiciously used by the Abbé de Sade. The most trivial event seems to have stirred the poetic feeling within him. We find no less than four sonnets indited to his mistress's gloves, and three to her eyes; which last, styled, *par excellence,* "The Three Sisters," are in the greatest repute with his countrymen,—a judgment on which most English critics would be at issue with them. Notwithstanding the

vicious affectation of style and the mysticism which occasionally obscure these and other pieces of Petrarch, his general tone exhibits a moral dignity unknown to the sordid appetites of the ancients, and an earnestness of passion rarely reflected from the cold glitter of the Provençal. But it is in the verses written after the death of his mistress that he confesses the inspiration of Christianity, in the deep moral coloring which he has given to his descriptions of nature, and in those visions of immortal happiness which he contrasts with the sad realities of the present life. He dwells rather on the melancholy pleasures of retrospection than those of hope; unlike most of the poets of Italy, whose warm, sunny skies seem to have scattered the gloom which hangs over the poetry of the North. In this and some other peculiarities, Dante and Petrarch appear to have borne greater resemblance to the English than to their own nation.

Petrarch's career, however brilliant, may serve rather as a warning than as a model. The querulous tone of some of his later writings, the shade of real sorrow which seems to come across even his brightest moments, show the utter inefficacy of genius and of worldly glory to procure to their possessor a substantial happiness. It is melancholy to witness the aberrations of mind into which so fine a genius was led by unfortunate passion. The apparition of Laura haunted him by night as well as by day, in society and in solitude. He sought to divert his mind by travelling, by political or literary occupation, by reason and religion; but in

vain. His letters and private confessions show, no less than his poetry, how incessantly his imagination was tortured by doubts, hopes, fears, melancholy presages, regrets, and despair. She triumphed over the decay of her personal charms, and even over the grave, for it was a being of the mind he worshipped. There is something affecting in seeing such a mind as Petrarch's feeding on this unrequited passion, and more than twenty years after his mistress's death, and when on the verge of the grave himself, depicting her in all the bright coloring of youthful fancy, and following her in anticipation to that heaven where he hopes soon to be united to her.

Petrarch's example, even in his own day, was widely infectious. He sarcastically complains of the quantities of verses sent to him for correction, from the farthest north, from Germany and the British Isles, then the *Ultima Thule* of civilization. The pedants of the succeeding age, it is true, wasted their efforts in hopeless experiments upon the ancient languages, whose chilling influence seems to have entirely closed the hand of the native minstrel; and it was not until the time of Lorenzo de' Medici, whose correct taste led him to prefer the flexible movements of a living tongue, that the sweet tones of the Italian lyre were again awakened. The excitement, however, soon became general, affecting all ranks, from the purpled prelate down to the most humble artisan; and a collection of the *Beauties* (as we should call them) of this latter description of worthies has been gathered into a respectable volume, which Baretti

assures us, with a good-natured criticism, may be compared with the verses of Petrarch. In all these the burden of the song is love. Those who did not feel could at least affect the tender passion. Lorenzo de' Medici pitched upon a mistress as deliberately as Don Quixote did on his Dulcinea; and Tasso sighed away his soul to a nymph so shadowy as sorely to have puzzled his commentators till the time of Serassi.

It would be unavailing to attempt to characterize those who have followed in the footsteps of the Laureate, or we might dwell on the romantic sweetness of Lorenzo de' Medici, the purity of Vittoria Colonna, the elaborate polish of Bembo, the vivacity of Marini, and the eloquence, the Platonic reveries, and rich coloring of Tasso, whose beauties and whose defects so nearly resemble those of his great original in this department. But we have no leisure to go minutely into the shades of difference between the imitators of Petrarch. One may regret that, amid their clouds of amorous incense, he can so rarely discern the religious or patriotic enthusiasm which animates the similar compositions of the Spanish poets, and which forms the noblest basis of lyrical poetry at all times. The wrongs of Italy, the common battle-field of the banditti of Europe for nearly a century, and at the very time when her poetic vein flowed most freely, might well have roused the indignation of her children. The comparatively few specimens on this theme from Petrarch to Filicaja are justly regarded as the happiest efforts of the Italian lyre.

The seventeenth century, so unfortunate for the national literature in all other respects, was marked by a bolder deviation from the eternal track of the Petrarchists; a reform, indeed, which may be traced back to Casa. Among these innovators, Chiabrera, whom Tiraboschi styles both Anacreon and Pindar, but who may be content with the former of these appellations, and Filicaja, who has found in the Christian faith sources of a sublimity that Pindar could never reach, are the most conspicuous. Their salutary example has not been lost on the modern Italian writers.

Some of the ancients have made a distinct division of lyrical poetry, under the title of *melicus*.* If, as it would seem, they mean something of a more calm and uniform tenor than the impetuous dithyrambic flow, something in which symmetry of form and melody of versification are chiefly considered, in which, in fine, the effeminate beauties of sentiment are preferred to the more hardy conceptions of fancy, the term may be significant of the great mass of Italian lyrics. But we fear that we have insisted too far on their defects. Our criticism has been formed rather on the average than on the highest specimens of the art. In this way the very luxuriance of the soil is a disadvantage to it. The sins of exuberance, however, are much more corrigible than those of sterility, which fall upon this department of poetry in almost every other nation. We must remember, too, that no people has exhibited the passion of love under such a variety of beautiful aspects, and that, after all,

* Ausonius, Edyl. IV., 54.—Cicero, De Opt. Gen. Oratorum, i.

although the amount be comparatively small, no other modern nation can probably produce so many examples of the very highest lyrical inspiration.

But it is time that we should return to the Romantic Epics, the most important and, perhaps, the most prolific branch of the ornamental literature of the Italians. They have been distributed into a great variety of classes by their own critics. We shall confine our remarks to some of their most eminent models, without regard to their classification.

Those who expect to find in these poems the same temper which animates the old English tales of chivalry will be disappointed. A much more correct notion of their manner may be formed from Mr. Ellis's *Bernesque* (if we may be allowed a significant term) recapitulations of these latter. In short, they are the marvels of an heroic age, told with the fine incredulous air of a polite one. It is this contrast of the dignity of the matter with the familiarity of the manner of narration that has occasioned among their countrymen so many animated disputes respecting the serious or satirical intentions of Pulci, Ariosto, Berni, and the rest.

The Italians, although they have brought tales of chivalry to higher perfection than any other people in the world, are, of all others, in their character the most anti-chivalrous. Their early republican institutions, which brought all classes nearly to the same level, were obviously unfavorable to the spirit of chivalry. Commerce became

the road to preferment. Wealth was their pedigree, and their patent of nobility. The magnificent Medici were bankers and merchants; and the ancient aristocracy of Venice employed their capital in traffic until an advanced period of the republic. Courage, so essential in the character of a knight, was of little account in the busy communities of Italy. Like Carthage of old, they trusted their defence to mercenaries, first foreign, and afterwards native, but who in every instance fought for hire, not honor, selling themselves, and often their employers, to the highest bidder; and who, cased in impenetrable mail, fought with so little personal hazard that Machiavelli has related more than one infamous encounter in which the only lives lost were from suffocation under their ponderous panoplies. So low had the military reputation of the Italians declined, that in the war of the Neapolitan succession in 1502 it was thought necessary for thirteen of their body to vindicate the national character from the imputation of cowardice by solemn defiance and battle against an equal number of French knights, in presence of the hostile armies.

Hence other arts came to be studied than that of war,—the arts of diplomacy and intrigue. Hence statesmen were formed, but not soldiers. The campaign was fought in the cabinet instead of the field. Every spring of cunning and corruption was essayed, and an insidious policy came into vogue, in which, as the philosopher who has digested its principles into a system informs us, "the failure, not the atrocity of a deed, was con-

sidered disgraceful." * The law of honor became different with the Italians from what it was with other nations. Conspiracy was preferred to open defiance, and assassination was a legitimate method of revenge. The State of Venice condescended to employ a secret agent against the life of Francis Sforza; and the noblest escutcheons in Italy, those of Este and the Medici, were stained with the crimes of fratricide and incest.

In this general moral turpitude, the literature of Italy was rapidly rising to its highest perfection. There was scarcely a petty state which, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, had not made brilliant advances in elegant prose, poetry, or the arts of design. Intellectual culture was widely diffused, and men of the highest rank devoted themselves with eagerness to the occupation of letters; this, too, at a time when learning in other countries was banished to colleges and cloisters; when books were not always essential in the education of a gentleman. Du Guesclin, the flower of French chivalry in the fourteenth century, could not read a word. Castiglione, in his Cortegiano, has given us so pleasing a picture of the recreations of the little court of Urbino, one of the many into which Italy was distributed at the close of the fifteenth century, as to suggest an exalted notion of its taste and cultivated habits; and Guicciardini has described, with all the eloquence of regret, the flourishing condition of his country at the same period, ere the

* Machiavelli, Istor. Flor., l. vi.

storm had descended on her beautiful valleys. In all this we see the characteristics of a highly-polished state of society, but none of the hardy virtues of chivalry.

It was precisely in such a state of society, light, lively and licentious, possessed of a high relish for the beauties of imagination, but without moral dignity or even a just moral sense, that the Muse of romance first appeared in Italy; and it was not to be expected that she would retain there her majestic Castilian port, or the frank, cordial bearing which endeared her to our Norman ancestors. In fact, the Italian fancy seems to have caught rather the gay, gossiping temper of the *fabliaux*. The most familiar and grotesque adventures are mixed in with the most serious, and even these last are related in a fine tone of ironical pleasantry. Magnificent inventions are recommended by agreeable illusions of style; but they not unfrequently furnish a flimsy drapery for impurity of sentiment. The high devotion and general moral aspect of our English Faerie Queene are not characteristic, with a few eminent exceptions, of Italian tales of chivalry, in which we too often find the best interests of our nature exposed to all the license of frivolous banter. Pulci, who has furnished an apology for the infamous Pucelle,* and Fortiguerra, with their school of imitators, may afford abundant examples to the curious in these matters.

* See Voltaire's preface to it. Chapelain's prosy poem on the same subject, La Pucelle d'Orléans, lives now only in the satire of Boileau. It was the hard fate of the Heroine of Orleans to be canonized in a dull epic and damned in a witty one.

The first successful models of the romantic epic were exhibited at the table of Lorenzo de' Medici, that remarkable man, who, as Machiavelli says of him, "seemed to unite in his person two distinct natures,"—who could pass from the severe duties of the council-chamber to mingle in the dances of the people, and from the abstractions of his favorite philosophy to the broad merriment of a convivial table. Amid all the elegance of the Medici, however,—of Lorenzo and Leo X.,—there seems to have been a lurking appetite for vulgar pleasure, at least if we may judge from the coarse, satirical repartee which Franco and his friend Pulci poured out upon one another for the entertainment of their patron, and the still more bald buffoonery which enlightened the palace of his pontifical son.

The Stanze of Politian, however, exhibit no trace of this obliquity of taste. This fragment of an epic, almost too brief for criticism, like a prelude to some beautiful air, seems to have opened the way to those delightful creations of the Muse which so rapidly followed, and to have contained within itself their various elements of beauty,—the invention of Boiardo, the picturesque narrative of Ariosto, and Tasso's flush of color. Every stanza is music to the ear, and affords a distinct picture to the eye. Unfortunately, Politian was soon seduced by the fashion of the age from the culture of his native tongue. Probably no Italian poet of equal promise was ever sacrificed to the manes of antiquity. His voluminous Latin labors are now forgotten, and this fragment of an epic

affords almost the only point from which he is still contemplated by posterity.

Pulci's Morgante is the first thorough-bred romance of chivalry which the Italians have received as *text of the tongue*. It is fashioned much more literally than any of its successors on Turpin's Chronicle, that gross medley of fact and fable, too barren for romance, too false for history; the dunghill from which have shot up, nevertheless, the bright flowers of French and Italian fiction. In like manner as in this, religion, not love, is the principle of Pulci's action. The theological talk of his devils may remind one of the prosy conference of Roland and Ferracute; and, strange to say, he is the only one of the eminent Italian poets who has adopted from the chronicle the celebrated rout at Roncesvalles. In his concluding cantos, which those who have censured him as a purely satirical or burlesque poet can have hardly reached, Pulci, throwing off the vulgar trammels which seem to have oppressed his genius, rises into the noblest conceptions of poetry, and describes the tragical catastrophe with all the eloquence of pathos and moral grandeur. Had he written often thus, the Morgante would now be resorted to by native purists, not merely as the well of Tuscan undefiled, but as the genuine fount of epic inspiration.

From the rank and military profession of Boiardo, it might be expected that his poem, the Orlando Innamorato, would display more of the lofty tone of chivalry than is usual with his countrymen; but, with some exceptions, the portrait of Ruggiero, for example, it will be difficult

to discern this. He, however, excels them all in a certain force of characterizing, and in an inexhaustible fertility of invention. His *dramatis personæ*, continued by Ariosto, might afford an excellent subject for a parallel, which we have not room to discuss. In general, he may be said to sculpture where Ariosto paints. His heroes assume a fiercer and more indomitable aspect, and his Amazonian females a more glaring and less fastidious coquetry. But it is in the regions of pure fancy that his muse delights to sport, where, instead of the cold conceptions of a Northern brain, which make up the machinery of Pulci, we are introduced to the delicate fairies of the East, to gardens blooming in the midst of the desert, to palaces of crystal, winged steeds, enchanted armor, and all the gay fabric of Oriental mythology. It has been the singular fate of Boiardo to have had his story continued and excelled by one poet, and his style reformed by another, until his own original work, and even his name, have passed into comparative oblivion. Berni's *rifacimento* is perhaps the most remarkable instance of the triumph of style on record. Every stanza reflects the sense of the original; yet such is the fascination of his diction, compared with the provincial barbarism of his predecessor, as to remind one of those mutations in romance where some old and withered hag is suddenly transformed into a blooming fairy. It may be doubted whether this could have succeeded so completely in a language where the beauties of style are less appreciated. Dryden has made a similar attempt in the Canter-

bury Tales; but who does not prefer the racy, romantic sweetness of Chaucer?

The Orlando Furioso, from its superior literary execution, as well as from its union of all the peculiarities of Italian tales of chivalry, may be taken as the representative of the whole species. Some of the national critics have condemned, and some have endeavored to justify, these peculiarities of the romantic epopee,—its complicated narrative and provoking interruptions, its transitions from the gravest to the most familiar topics, its lawless extravagance of fiction, and other deviations from the statutes of antiquity,—but very few have attempted to explain them on just and philosophical principles. The romantic eccentricities of the Italian poets are not to be imputed either to inattention or ignorance. Most of them were accomplished scholars, and went to their work with all the forecast of consummate artists. Boiardo was so well versed in the ancient tongues as to have made accurate translations of Herodotus and Apuleius. Ariosto was such an elegant Latinist that even the classic Bembo did not disdain to learn from him the mysteries of Horace. He consulted his friends over and over again on the disposition of this fable, assigning to them the most sufficient reasons for its complicated texture. In like manner, Tasso shows, in his Poetical Discourses, how deeply he had revolved the principles of his art, and his Letters prove his dexterity in the application of these principles to his own compositions. These illustrious minds understood well the difference between copying the ancients

and copying nature. They knew that to write by the rules of the former is not to write like them; that the genius of our institutions requires new and peculiar forms of expression; that nothing is more fantastic than a modern antique; and they wisely left the attempt and the failure to such spiritless pedants as Trissino.

The difference subsisting between the ancients and moderns, in the constitution of society, amply justifies the different principles on which they have proceeded in their works of imagination. Religion, love, honor,—what different ideas are conveyed by these terms in these different periods of history! * The love of country was the pervading feeling which, in the ancient Greek or Roman, seems to have absorbed every other, and to have obliterated, as it were, the moral idiosyncrasy of the individual, while with the moderns it is the *individual* who stands forward in principal relief. His loves, his private feuds and personal adventures, form the object almost of exclusive attention. Hence in the classical fable strict unity of action and concentration of interest are demanded, while in the romantic the object is best attained by variety of action and diversity of interest, and the threads of personal adventure separately conducted, and perpetually intersecting each other, make up the complicated texture of the fable. Hence it

* How feeble, as an operative principle, must religion have been among a people who openly avowed it to be the creation of their own poets! "Homer and Hesiod," says Herodotus, "created the theogony of the Greeks, assigning to the gods their various titles, characters, and forms." (Herod., ii. 63.) Religion, it is well known, was a principal basis of modern chivalry.

becomes so exceedingly difficult to discern who is the real hero, and what the main action, in such poems as the Innamorato and Furioso. Hence too, the episode, the accident, if we may so say, of the classical epic, becomes the essence of the romantic. On this explication, Tasso's delightful excursions, his adventures of Sophronia and Erminia, so often condemned as excrescences, may be admired as perfectly legitimate beauties.

The poems of Homer were intended as historical compositions. They were revered and quoted as such by the most circumspect of the national writers, as Thucydides and Strabo, for example. The romantic poets, on the other hand, seem to have intended nothing beyond a mere *délassement* of the imagination. The old Norman epics, it is true, exhibit a wonderful coincidence in their delineations of manners with the contemporary chronicles. But this is not the spirit of Italian romance, which has rarely had any higher ostensible aim than that of pure amusement,

> "Scritta cosi come la penna getta,
> Per fuggir l'ozio, e non per cercar gloria,"

and which was right, therefore, in seeking its materials in the wildest extravagances of fiction, the *magnanime menzogne* of chivalry, and the brilliant chimeras of the East.

The immortal epics of Ariosto and Tasso are too generally known to require from us any particular analysis. Some light, however, may be reflected on these poets from a contrast of their peculiarities. The period in which Tasso wrote

was one of high religious fermentation. The Turks, who had so long overawed Europe, had recently been discomfited in the memorable sea-fight of Lepanto, and the kindling enthusiasm of the nations seemed to threaten for a moment to revive the follies of the Crusades. Tasso's character was of a kind to be peculiarly sensible to these influences. His soul was penetrated with religious fervor, to which, as Serassi has shown, more than to any cause of mysterious passion, are to be imputed his occasional mental aberrations. He was distinguished, moreover, by his chivalrous personal valor, put to the test in more than one hazardous encounter; and he was reckoned the most expert swordsman of his time. Tasso's peculiarities of character were singularly suited to his subject. He has availed himself of this to the full in exhibiting the resources and triumphs of Christian chivalry. The intellectual rather than the physical attributes of his supernatural agents, his solemn meditations on the fragility of earthly glory, and the noble ardor with which he leads us to aspire after an imperishable crown, give to his epic a moral grandeur which no preceding poet had ever reached. It has been objected to him, however, that he preferred the intervention of subordinate agents to that of the Deity; but the God of the Christians cannot be introduced like those of pagan mythology. They espoused the opposite sides of the contest; but wherever He appears the balance is no longer suspended, and the poetical interest is consequently destroyed.

Victrix causa Diis placuit, sed victa Catoni."

This might be sublime with the ancients, but it would be blasphemous and absurd with the moderns; and Tasso judged wisely in availing himself of inferior and intermediate ministers.

Ariosto's various subject—

"Le donne, i cavalier', l'arme, gli amori"—

was equally well suited with Tasso's to his own various and flexible genius. It did not, indeed, admit of the same moral elevation, in which he was himself perhaps deficient, but it embraced within its range every variety of human passion and portraiture. Tasso was of a solitary, as Ariosto was of a social temper. He had no acquaintance with affairs, and Gravina accuses him of drawing his knowledge from books instead of men. He turned his thoughts inward, and matured them by deep and serious meditation. He had none of the volatile talents of his rival, who seems to have parted with his brilliant fancies as readily as the tree gives up its leaves in autumn. Ariosto was a man of the world, and in his philosophy may be styled an Epicurean. His satires show a familiarity with the practical concerns of life, and a deep insight into the characters of men. His conceptions, however, were of the earth; and his pure style, which may be compared with Alcina's transparent drapery, too often reveals to us the grossest impurity of thought.

The muse of Tasso was of a heavenly nature, and nourished herself with celestial visions and ideal forms of beauty. He was a disciple of Plato, and hence the source of his general elevation of

thought, and, too often, of his mystical abstraction. The healthful bloom of his language imparts an inexpressible charm to the purity of his sentiments, and it is truly astonishing that so chaste and dignified a composition should have been produced in an age and court so corrupt.

Both of these great artists elaborated their style with the utmost care, but with totally different results. This frequently gave to Tasso's verse the finish of a lyrical, or, rather, of a musical composition; for many of his stanzas have less resemblance to the magnificent rhythm of Petrarch than to the melodious monotony of Metastasio. This must be considered a violation of the true epic style. It is singular that Tasso himself, in one of his poetical criticisms, should have objected this very defect to his rival.* The elaboration of Ariosto, on the other hand, resulted in that exquisite negligence, or, rather, artlessness of expression, so easy in appearance, but so difficult in reality to be imitated:

"Facil' versi che costan tanta pena."

The Jerusalem Delivered is placed, by the nice discrimination of the Italian critics, at the head of their heroic epics. In its essence, however, it is strictly romantic, though in its form it is accommodated to the general proportions of the antique. In Ariosto's complicated fable it is difficult to discern either a leading hero or a predominant action. Sismondi applauds Ginguené for having

* Discorsi Poetici, iii.

discovered this hero in Ruggiero. But both those writers might have found this discovery, where it was revealed more than two centuries ago, in Tasso's own Discourses.* We doubt, however, its accuracy, and cannot but think that the prominent part assigned to Orlando, from whom the poem derives its name, manifests a different intention in the author.

The stately and imposing beauties of Tasso's epic have rendered it generally the most acceptable to foreigners, while the volatile graces of Ariosto have made him most popular with his own nation. Both poets have had the rare felicity not only of obtaining the applause of the learned, but of circulating among the humblest classes of their countrymen. Fragments of the Furioso are still recited by the *lazzaroni* of Naples, as those of the Jerusalem once were by the gondoliers of Venice, where this beautiful epic, broken up into ballads, might be heard for miles along the canals on a tranquil summer evening. Had Boileau, who so bitterly sneers at the *clinquant* of Tasso, "heard these musical contests," says Voltaire, "he would have had nothing to say." It is worthy of remark that these two celebrated poems, together with the Aminta, the Pastor Fido, and the Secchia Rapita, were all produced within the brief compass of a century, in the petty principality of the house of Este, which thus seemed to indemnify itself for its scanty territory by its ample acquisitions in the intellectual world.

The mass of epical imitations in Italy, both of

* Ibid., ii.

Ariosto and Tasso, especially the former, is perfectly overwhelming. Nor is it easy to understand the patience with which the Italians have resigned themselves to these interminable poems of seventy, eighty, or even ninety thousand verses each. Many of them, it must be admitted, are the work of men of real genius, and, in a literature less fruitful in epic excellence, would have given a wide celebrity to their authors; and the amount of others of less note, in a department so rarely attempted in other countries, shows in the nation at large a wonderful fecundity of fancy.

The Italians, desirous of combining as many attractions as possible, and extremely sensible to harmony, have not, as has been the case in France and England, divested their romances of the music of verse. They have rarely adopted a national subject for their story, but have condescended to borrow those of the old Norman minstrels; and, in conformity with the characteristic temperament of the nation, they have almost always preferred the mercurial temper of the court of Charlemagne to the more sober complexion of the Round Table.*

With a few exceptions, the romantic poets, since the time of Ariosto, appear to have gained as little in elevation of sentiment as in national feeling. The nice classification of their critics seems to relate only to their varieties of comic character, and, as we descend to a later period, the fine, equiv-

* The French antiquary Tressan furnishes an exception to the general criticism of his countrymen, in admitting the superiority of this latter class of romances over those of Charlemagne.

ocal raillery of the older romances degenerates into a broad and undisguised burlesque. In the latter class, the Ricciardetto of Fortiguerra is a jest rather than a satire upon tales of chivalry. The singular union which this work exhibits of elegance of style and homeliness of subject may have furnished, especially in its introduction, the model of that species of poetry which Lord Byron has familiarized us with in Don Juan, where the contrast of sentiment and satire, of vivid passion and chill misanthropy, of images of beauty and splenetic sarcasm, may remind one of the whimsical combinations in Alpine scenery, where the strawberry blooms on the verge of a snow-wreath.

The Italians claim to have given the first models of mock-heroic poetry in modern times. The Secchia Rapita of Tassoni has the merit of a graceful versification, exhibiting many exquisite pictures of voluptuous repose, and some passages of an imposing grandeur. But these accord ill with the vulgar merriment and general burlesque tone of the piece, which, on the whole, presents a strange medley of beauties and blemishes mixed up promiscuously together. Twelve cantos of hard fighting and cutting of throats are far too serious for a joke. The bloodless battle of the books in the Lutrin, or those of the pot-valiant heroes of Knickerbocker, are in much better keeping. The Italians have no poetry of a *mezzo carattere* like our Rape of the Lock,* where a fine atmosphere of irony pervades the piece and gives life to every character in it. They appear to de-

* Pignotti, Storia della Toscana, tom. x. p. 132.

light in that kind of travesty which reduces great things into little, but which is of a much less spiritual nature than that which exalts little things into great. Parini's exquisite Giorno, if the satire had not rather too sharp an edge, might furnish an exception to both these remarks.

But it is time that we should turn to the *Novelle*, those delightful "tales of pleasantry and love," which form one of the most copious departments of the national literature. And here we may remark two peculiarities: first, that similar tales in France and England fell entirely into neglect after the fifteenth century, while in Italy they have been cultivated with the most unwearied assiduity from their earliest appearance to the present hour; secondly, that in the former countries the *fabliaux* were almost universally exhibited in a poetical dress, while in Italy, contrary to the popular taste on all other occasions, they have been as uniformly exhibited in prose. These peculiarities are undoubtedly to be imputed to the influence of Boccaccio, whose transcendent genius gave a permanent popularity to this kind of composition, and finally determined the forms of elegant prose with his nation.

The appearance of the Decameron is, in some points of view, as remarkable a phenomenon as that of the Divine Comedy. It furnishes the only example on record of the almost simultaneous development of prose and poetry in the literature of a nation. The earliest prose of any pretended literary value in the Greek tongue, the most precocious of any of antiquity, must be placed near

four centuries after the poems of Homer. To descend to modern times, the Spaniards have a little work,* "El Conde Lucanor," nearly contemporary with the Decameron, written on somewhat of a similar plan, but far more didactic in its purport. Its style, though marked by a certain freshness and *naïveté*, the healthy beauties of an infant dialect, has nothing of a classical finish; to which, indeed, Castilian prose, notwithstanding its fine old chronicles and romances, can make no pretension before the close of the fifteenth century. In France a still later period must be assigned for this perfection. Dante, it is true, speaks of the peculiar suitableness of the French language in his day for prose narration, on account of its flexibility and freedom;† but Dante had few and very inadequate standards of comparison, and experience has shown how many ages of purification it was to undergo before it could become the vehicle of elegant composition. Pascal's Provincial Letters furnish, in the opinion of the national critics, the earliest specimen of good prose. It would be more difficult to agree upon the author or the period that arrested the fleeting forms of expression in our own language; but we certainly could not venture upon an earlier date than the conclusion of the seventeenth century.

The style of the Decameron exhibits the full maturity of an Augustan age. The finish of its periods, its long, Latinized involutions, but es-

* "El Conde Lucanor" of Don Juan Manuel is a collection of fifty tales, anecdotes and apologues, reminding one of the "Thousand and One Nights."—M.

† De Vulgari Eloquio, lib. i. cap. x.

pecially its redundancy and Asiatic luxury of expression, vices imputed to Cicero by his own contemporaries, as Quintilian informs us, reveal to us the model on which Boccaccio diligently formed himself. In the more elevated parts of his subject he reaches to an eloquence not unworthy of the Roman orator himself. The introductions to his novels, chiefly descriptive, are adorned with all the music and the coloring of poetry; much too poetic, indeed, for the prose of any other tongue. It cannot be doubted that this brilliant piece of mechanism has had an immense influence on the Italians, both in seducing them into a too exclusive attention to mere beauties of style, and in leading them to solicit such beauties in graver and less appropriate subjects than those of pure invention.

In the celebrated description of the Plague, however, Boccaccio has shown a muscular energy of diction quite worthy of the pen of Thucydides. Yet there is no satisfactory evidence that he had read the similar performance of the Greek historian, and the conjecture of Baldelli to that effect is founded only on a resemblance of some detached passages, which might well occur in treating of a similar disease.* In the delineation of its fearful moral consequences, Boccaccio has undoubtedly surpassed his predecessor. It is singular that of the three celebrated narratives of this distemper, that by the Englishman De Foe is by far the most circumstantial in its details, and yet that he was the only one of the three historians who was not an

* Vita di Boccaccio, lib. ii. s. 2, note.

THE DECAMERON.

Goupil & Cie Paris

eye-witness to what he relates.* The Plague of London happened in the year succeeding his birth.

The Italian novelists have followed so closely in the track of Boccaccio that we may discuss their general attributes without particular reference to him, their beauties and their blemishes varying only in degree. They ransacked every quarter for their inventions,—Eastern legends, Norman *fabliaux,* domestic history, tradition, and vulgar contemporary anecdote. They even helped themselves, *plenis manibus,* to one another's fancies, particularly filching from the Decameron, which has for this reason been pleasantly compared to a pawnbroker's shop. But no exceptions seem to be taken at such plagiarism, and, as long as the story could be disguised in a different dress, they cared little for the credit of the invention. These fictions are oftentimes of the most grotesque and improbable character, exhibiting no great skill in the *liaison* of events, which are strung together with the rude artlessness of a primitive *trouveur,* while most promising beginnings are frequently brought up by flat and impotent conclusions. Many of the *novelle* are made up of mere personal anecdote, proverbialisms, and Florentine table-talk, the ingredients of an encyclopædia of wit. In all this, however, we often find less wit than merriment, which shows itself in the most puerile practical jokes, played off upon idiots, unfortunate pedants, and other imbeciles, with as little taste as feeling.

* It seems probable, however, from a passage in Boccaccio, cited by Bandelli, that he witnessed the plague in some other city of Italy than Florence.

The *novelle* wear the usual light and cheerful aspect of Italian literature. They seldom aim at a serious or didactic purpose. Their tragical scenes, though very tragical, are seldom affecting. We recollect in them no example of the passion of love treated with the depth and tenderness of feeling so frequent in the English dramatists and novelists. They can make little pretension, indeed, to accurate delineation of character of any sort. Even Boccaccio, who has acquired, in our opinion, a somewhat undeserved celebrity in this way, paints professions rather than individuals. The brevity of the Italian tale, which usually affords space only for the exhibition of a catastrophe, is an important obstacle to a gradual development of character.

A remarkable trait in these *novelle* is the extreme boldness with which the reputations of the clergy are handled. Their venality, lechery, hypocrisy, and abominable impositions are all exposed with a reckless independence. The head of the Church himself is not spared. It is not easy to account for this authorized latitude in a country where so jealous a surveillance has been maintained over the freedom of the press in relation to other topics. Warton attempts to explain it, as far as regards the Decameron, by supposing that the ecclesiastics of that age had become tainted with the dissoluteness so prevalent after the Plague of 1348; and Madame de Stäel suggests that the government winked at this license as the jesting of children, who are content to obey their masters so they may laugh at them. But neither of these

solutions will suffice; for the license of Boccaccio has been assumed more or less by nearly every succeeding novelist, and the jests of this merry tribe have been converted into the most stinging satire on the clergy, in the hands of the gravest and most powerful writers of the nation, from Dante to Monti.

It may be truly objected to the Italian novelists that they have been as little solicitous about purity of sentiment as they have been too much so about purity of style. The reproach of indecency lies heavily upon most of their writings, from the Decameron to the infamous tales of Casti, which, reeking with the corruption of a brothel, have passed into several surreptitious editions during the present century. This indecency is not always a mere excrescence, but deeply ingrained in the body of the piece. It is not conveyed in innuendo, or softened under the varnish of sentiment, but is exhibited in all the nakedness of detail which a debauched imagination can divine. Petrarch's encomiastic letter to his friend Boccaccio, written at the close of his own life, in which he affects to excuse the licentiousness of the Decameron from the youth of the author,* although he was turned of forty when he composed it, has been construed into an ample apology for their own transgressions by the subsequent school of novelists.

It is true that some of the popes, of a more fastidious conscience, have taken exceptions at the license of the Decameron, and have placed it on the Index; but an expurgated edition, whose only

* Petrarca Opera, ed. Basil., p. 540.

alteration consisted in the substitution of lay names for those of the clergy, set all things right again.

Such adventures as the seduction of a friend's wife, or the deceptions practised upon a confiding husband, are represented as excellent pieces of wit in these fictions,—in some of the best of them, even; and often when their authors would be moral they betray, in their confused perceptions of right and wrong, the most deplorable destitution of a moral sense. Grazzini (*il Lasca*), one of the most popular of the tribe of the sixteenth century, after invoking, in the most solemn manner, the countenance of the Deity upon his labors, and beseeching Him to inspire his mind "with such thoughts only as may redound to his praise and glory," enters immediately, in the next page, upon one of the most barefaced specimens of "bold bawdry," to make use of the plain language of Roger Ascham, that is to be found in the whole work. It is not easy to estimate the demoralizing influence of writings many of which, being possessed of the beauties of literary finish, are elevated into the rank of classics and thus find their way into the most reserved and fastidious libraries.

The literary execution of these tales is, however, by no means equal. In some it is even neglected, and in all falls below that of their great original. Still, in the larger part the graces of style are sedulously cultivated, and in many constitute the principal merit. Some of their authors, especially the more ancient, as Sacchetti and Ser Giovanni, derive great repute from their picturesque pro-

verbialisms (*riboboli*), the racy slang of the Florentine mob,—pearls of little price with foreigners, but of great estimation with their own countrymen. On these qualities, however, as on all those of mere external form, a stranger should pronounce with great diffidence; but the intellectual and moral character of a composition, especially the last, are open to universal criticism. The principles of taste may differ in different nations; but, however often obscured by education or habit, there can be only one true standard of morality.

We may concede, then, to many of the *novelle* the merits of a delicate work of art, gracefulness, nay, eloquence of style, agreeable facility of narrative, pleasantry that sometimes rises into wit, occasional developments of character, and an inexhaustible novelty of situation. But we cannot help regretting that, while so many of the finest wits of the nation have amused themselves with these compositions, they should not have exhibited virtue in a more noble and imposing attitude, or studied a more scientific delineation of passion, or a more direct moral aim or practical purpose. How rarely do we find, unless it be in some few of the last century, the didactic or even satirical tone of the English essayists, who seldom assume the Oriental garb, so frequent in Italian tales, for any other purpose than that of better conveying a prudential lesson! Goldsmith and Hawkesworth may furnish us with pertinent examples of this. How rarely do we recognize in these *novelle* the living portraiture of Chaucer, or the philosoph-

ical point which sharpens the pleasantry of La Fontaine; both competitors in the same walk. Without any higher object than that of present amusement, these productions, like many others of their elegant literature, seem to be thrown off in the mere gayety of the heart.

Chaucer, in his peculiarities, represents as faithfully those of the English nation as his rival and contemporary Boccaccio represents the Italian. In a searching anatomy of the human heart he as far excels the latter as in rhetorical beauty he is surpassed by him. The prologue to his Canterbury Tales alone contains a gallery of portraits such as is not to be found in the whole compass of the Decameron; his friar, for example,

> "That somewhat lisped from his wantonnesse
> To make his Englishe sweete upon his tonge;"

his worthy parson, "glad to teche and glad to lerne;" his man of the law, who,

> "Though so besy a man as he ther n' as,
> Yet seemed besier than he was;"

and his inimitable wag of a host, breaking his jests, like Falstaff, indiscriminately upon every one he meets. Chaucer was a shrewd observer of the realities of life. He did not indulge in day-dreams of visionary perfection. His little fragment of Sir Thopaz is a fine quiz upon the *incredibilia* of chivalry. In his conclusion of the story of the patient Griselde, instead of adopting the somewhat *fade* eulogiums of Boccaccio, he good-naturedly jests at the ultra perfection of the

heroine. Like Shakspeare and Scott, his successors and superiors in the school of character, he seems to have had too vivid a perception of the vanities of human life to allow him for a moment to give in to those extravagances of perfection which have sprung from the brain of so many fond enthusiasts.

Chaucer's genius was every way equal to that of Boccaccio, yet the direct influence of the one can scarcely be discerned beyond his own age, while that of the other has reached to the present generation. A principal cause of this is the difference of their style; that of the former exhibiting only the rude graces of a primitive dialect, while Boccaccio's may be said to have reached the full prime of a cultivated period. Another cause is discernible in the new and more suitable forms which came to be adopted for that delineation of character which constitutes the essence of Chaucer's fictions, viz., those of the drama and the extended novel, in both of which Italian literature has, until very recently, been singularly deficient. Boccaccio made two elaborate essays in novel-writing, but his genius seems to have been ill adapted to it, and in his strange and prolix narrative, which brings upon the stage again the obsolete deities of antiquity, even the natural graces of his style desert him. The attempt has scarcely been repeated until our day, when the impulse communicated by the English, in romance and historical novel-writing, to other nations on the Continent, seems to have extended itself to Italy; and the extraordinary favor which has been shown there to the first essays

in this way may perhaps lead eventually to more brilliant successes.

The Spaniards, under no better circumstances than the Italians, made, previously to the last-mentioned period, a nearer approach to the genuine novel. Cervantes has furnished, amid his caricatures of chivalry, many passages of exquisite pathos and pleasantry, and a rich variety of national portraiture. The same, though in a less degree, may be affirmed of his shorter tales, *Novelas exemplares,* which, however inferior to those of the Decameron in rhetorical elegance, certainly surpass them in their practical application. But the peculiar property of the Spaniards is their *picaresco* novel, a mere chronicle of the adventures and mischievous pranks of young pickpockets and *chevaliers d'industrie,* invented whimsically enough, by a Castilian grandee, one of the proudest of his caste, and which, notwithstanding the glaring contrast it affords to the habitual gravity of the nation, has, perhaps from this very circumstance, been a great favorite with it ever since.

The French have made other advances in novel-writing. They have produced many specimens of wit and of showy sentiment, but they seldom afford any wide range of observation or searching views of character. The conventional breeding that universally prevails in France has levelled all inequalities of rank, and obliterated, as it were, the moral physiognomy of the different classes, which, however salutary in other respects, is exceedingly unpropitious to the purposes of the novelist. Molière, the most popular character-

monger of the French, has penetrated the superficies of the most artificial state of society. His spirited sketches of fashionable folly, though very fine, very Parisian, are not always founded on the universal principles of human nature, and, when founded on these, they are sure to be carried more or less into caricature. The French have little of the English talent for humor. They have buffoonery, a lively wit, and a *naïveté* beyond the reach of art,—Rabelais, Voltaire, La Fontaine,—every thing but humor. How spiritless and affected are the caricatures so frequently stuck up at their shop-windows, and which may be considered as the popular expression in this way, compared with those of the English! It is impossible to conceive of a French Goldsmith or Fielding, a Hogarth or a Wilkie. They have, indeed, produced a Le Sage, but he seems to have confessed the deficiency of his own nation by deriving his models exclusively from a foreign one.

On the other hand, the freedom of the political and social institutions, both in this country and in England, which has encouraged the undisguised expansion of intellect and of peculiarities of temper, has made them the proper theatre for the student of his species. Hence man has been here delineated with an accuracy quite unrivalled in any ancient or modern nation, and, as the Greeks have surpassed every later people in statuary, from their familiarity with the visible naked forms of manly beauty, so the English may be said, from an analogous cause, to have excelled all others in moral portraiture. To this point their most emi-

nent artists have directed their principal attention. We have already noticed it in Chaucer. It formed the essence of the drama in Elizabeth's time, as it does that of the modern novel. Shakspeare and Scott, in their respective departments, have undoubtedly carried this art to the highest perfection of which it is capable, sacrificing to it every minor consideration of probability, incident, and gradation of plot, which they seem to have valued only so far as they might be made subservient to the main purpose of a clearer exposition of character.

But it is time to return from the digression into which we have been led by a desire of illustrating certain peculiarities of Italian literature, which can in no way be done so well as by comparing them with those of corresponding departments in other languages. Such a comparison abundantly shows how much deeper and more philosophical have been the views proposed by prose fiction in England than in Italy.

We have reserved the Drama for the last, as, until a very recent period, it has been less prolific in eminent models than either of the great divisions of Italian letters. Yet it has been the one most assiduously cultivated from a very early period, and this, too, by the ripest scholars and most approved wits. The career was opened by such minds as Ariosto and Machiavelli, at a time when the theatres in other parts of Europe had given birth only to the unseemly abortions of mysteries and moralities. Bouterwek has been led into a strange error in imputing the low condition of the Italian drama to the small number of men

of even moderate abilities who have cultivated it.* A glance at the long muster-roll of eminent persons employed upon it, from Machiavelli to Monti, will prove the contrary.† The unprecedented favor bestowed on the most successful of the dramatic writers may serve to show, at least, the aspirations of the people. The Merope of Maffei, which may be deemed the first dawn of improvement in the tragic art, passed through sixty editions. Notwithstanding all this, the Italians, in comedy, and still more in tragedy, until the late apparition of Alfieri, remained far below several of the other nations of Europe.

A principal cause of their repeated failures has been often referred to the inherent vices of their system, which required a blind conformity with the supposed rules of Aristotle. Under the cumbrous load of antiquity, the freedom and grace of natural movement were long impeded. Their first attempts were translations, or literal imitations, of the Latin theatre. Some of these, though objectionable in form, contain the true spirit of comedy. Those of Ariosto and Machiavelli in particular, with even greater licentiousness of detail and a more immoral conclusion than belong either to Plautus or Terence, fully equal, perhaps surpass them, in their spirited and whimsical draughts of character. Ariosto is never more a satirist than in his comedies; and Machiavelli, in his Mandra-

* See the conclusion of his History of Spanish Literature.

† See Allacci's Drammaturgia, *passim*, and Riccoboni, Theatre Ital., tom. i. pp. 187–208. Allacci's catalogue, as continued down to the middle of the eighteenth century, occupies nearly a thousand quarto pages.

gola, has exposed the hypocrisies of religion with a less glaring caricature than Molière has shown in his Tartuffe. The spirit of these great masters did not descend to their immediate successors. Goldoni, however, the Molière of Italy, in his numerous comedies or farces, has succeeded in giving a lively, graphic portraiture of local manners, with infinite variety and comic power, but no great depth of interest. He has seldom risen to refined and comprehensive views of society, and his pieces, we may trust, are not to be received as faithfully reflecting the national character, which they would make singularly deficient both in virtue and the principle of honor. The writers who have followed in the footsteps of Goldoni exhibit, for the most part, similar defects, with far inferior comic talent. Their productions on the whole, however, may be thought to maintain an advantageous comparison with those of any other people in Europe during the same period, although some of them, to judge from the encomiastic tone of their critics, appear to have obtained a wider celebrity with their contemporaries than will be probably conceded to them by posterity. The *comedies of art* which Goldoni superseded, and which were, perhaps, more indicative of the national taste than any other dramatic performances, can hardly come within the scope of literary criticism.

The Italian writers would seem not even to have agreed upon a suitable measure for comedy, some using the common *versi sciolti*, some the *sdruccioli*, others, again, the *martelliani*, and many more pre-

ferring prose.* Another impediment to their success is the great variety of dialects in Italy, as numerous as her petty states, which prevents the recognition of any one uniform style of familiar conversation for comedy. The greater part of the pieces of Goldoni are written, more or less, in the local idiom of one of the extremities of Italy,—an inconvenience which cannot exist and which can hardly be appreciated in a country where one acknowledged capital has settled the medium of polite intercourse.

The progress of the nation in the tragic art, until a late period, has been yet more doubtful. Some notion may be formed of its low state in the last century from the circumstance that when the players were in want of a serious piece they could find none so generally acceptable as an opera of Metastasio, stripped of its musical accompaniments. The appearance of Alfieri at this late season, of a genius so austere, in the midst of the voluptuous, Sybarite effeminacy of the period, is a remarkable phenomenon. It was as if the severe Doric proportions of a Pæstum temple had been suddenly raised up amid the airy forms of Palladian architecture. The reserved and impenetrable character of this man has been perfectly laid open to us in his own autobiography. It was made up of incongruity and paradox. To indomitable passions he joined the most frigid exterior. With the fiercest aristocratic nature, he yet quitted his native state

* Professor Salfi affirms prose to be the most suitable, indeed the only proper, dress for Italian comedy. See his sensible *critique* on the Italian comic drama, prefixed to the late edition of Alberto Nota's Commedie, Paris, 1829.

that he might enjoy unmolested the sweets of liberty. He published one philippic against kings, and another against the people. His theoretic love of freedom was far from being warmed by the genuine glow of patriotism. Of all his tragedies, he condescended to derive two only from Italian history; and when, in his prefaces, dedications, or elsewhere, he takes occasion to notice his countrymen, he does it in the bitterness of irony and insult.

When he first set about his tragedies, he could compose only in a sort of French and Piedmontese *patois*. He was unacquainted with any written dramatic literature, though he had witnessed the theatrical exhibitions of the principal capitals of Europe. He was, therefore, to form himself all fresh upon such models as he might prefer. His haughty spirit carried him back to the *trecentisti*, especially to Dante whose stern beauties he sedulously endeavored to transfuse into his own style. He studied Tacitus, moreover, with diligence, and made three entire translations of Sallust. He was greatly afraid of falling into the *cantilena* of Metastasio, and sought to avoid this by sudden abruptions of language, by an eccentric use of the articles and pronouns, by dislocating the usual structure of verse, and by distributing the emphatic words with exclusive reference to the sense.*

This unprecedented manner brought upon Alfieri a host of critics, and he was compelled, in a

* See a summary of these peculiarities in Casalbigi's Letter, prefixed to the late editions of Alfieri's tragedies.

subsequent edition, to soften down its most offensive asperities. He imputes to himself as many different styles of composition as distinguish the works of Raphael, and it is pretty evident that he considers the last as near perfection as he could well hope to attain. It is, indeed, a noble style: with the occasional turbulence of a mighty rapid, it has all its fulness and magnificent flow; and it shows how utterly impossible it is, by any effort of art, to repress the natural melody of the Tuscan.

Alfieri effected a still more important revolution in the intellectual character of the drama, arousing it from the lethargy into which it had fallen, and making it the vehicle of generous and heroic sentiment. He forced his pieces sometimes, it is true, by violent contrast, but he brought out his characters with a fulness of relief and exhibited a dexterous combat of passion that may not unfrequently remind us of Shakspeare. He dismissed all supernumeraries from his plays and put into action what his predecessors had coldly narrated. He dispensed, moreover, with the curious coincidences, marvellous surprises, and all the *bei colpi di scena* so familiar in the plays of Metastasio. He disdained even the poetical aid of imagery, relying wholly for effect on the dignity of his sentiments and the imposing character of his agents.

Alfieri has been thought to have made a nearer approach to the Greek tragedy than any of the moderns. He, indeed, disclaims the imitation of any foreign model, and he did not learn the Greek till late in life; but the drama of his own nation had always been servilely accommodated to the

rules of the ancients, and he himself had rigorously adhered to the same code. His severe genius, too, wears somewhat of the aspect of that of the father of Grecian tragedy, with which it has been repeatedly compared; but any apparent resemblance in their compositions vanishes on a closer inspection. The assassination of Agamemnon, for example, forms the subject of a tragedy with both these writers; but on what different principles it is conducted by each! The larger proportion of the play of Æschylus is taken up with the melancholy monologues of Cassandra and the chorus, which, boding the coming disasters of the house of Atreus, or mourning over the destiny of man, are poured forth in a lofty dithyrambic eloquence that gives to the whole the air of a lyrical rather than a dramatic composition. It was this lyrical enthusiasm which, doubtless, led Plutarch to ascribe the inspiration of Æschylus to the influence of the grape.* The dialogue of the piece is of a most inartificial texture, and to an English audience might sometimes appear flat. The action moves heavily, and the principal—indeed, with the exception of Agamemnon, the only—attempt at character is in the part of Clytemnestra, whose gigantic stature overshadows the whole piece, and who appalls the spectator by avowing the deed of assassination with the same ferocity with which she had executed it.

Alfieri, on the other hand, refuses the subsidiary

* Sympos. LVII., Prob. 10. In the same spirit, a critic of a more polished age has denounced Shakspeare's Hamlet as the work of a drunken savage! See Voltaire's Dissertation sur la Tragédie, etc., addressed to Cardinal Querini.

aids of poetical imagery. He expressly condemns, in his criticisms, a confounding of the lyric and the dramatic styles. He elaborated his dialogue with the nicest art and with exclusive reference to the final catastrophe. *Scenæ non levis artifex.* His principal aim is to exhibit the collision of passions. The conflicts between passion and principle in the bosom of Clytemnestra, whom he has made a subordinate agent, furnish him with his most powerful scenes. He has portrayed the Iago-like features of Ægisthus in the darkest colors of Italian vengeance. The noble nature of Agamemnon stands more fully developed than in the Greek, and the sweet character of Electra is all his own. The assassination of the king of men in his bed, at the lonely hour of midnight, must forcibly remind the English reader of the similar scene in Macbeth; but, though finely conceived, it is far inferior to the latter in those fearful poetical accompaniments which give such an air of breathless horror to the story. In solemn mysterious imaginings, who indeed can equal Shakspeare? He is the only modern poet who has succeeded in introducing the dim form of an apparition on the stage with any tolerable effect. Yet Voltaire accuses him of mistaking the horrible for the terrible. When Voltaire had occasion to raise a ghost upon the French stage (a ticklish experiment), he made him so amiable in his aspect that Queen Semiramis politely desires leave to "throw herself at his feet and to embrace them." *

It has been a matter of debate whether Italian

* Semiramis, acte iii. s. 6.

tragedy, as reformed by Alfieri, is an improvement on the French. Both are conducted on the same general principles. A. W. Schlegel, a competent critic whenever his own prejudices are not involved, decides in favor of the French. We must confess ourselves inclined to a different opinion. The three master-spirits in French tragedy seem to have contained within themselves all the elements of dramatic creation, yet their best performances have something tame and unsatisfactory in them. We see the influence of that fine-spun web of criticism which in France has bound the wing of genius to the earth, and which no one has been hardy enough to burst asunder. Corneille, after a severe lesson, submitted to it, though with an ill grace. The flexible character of Racine moved under it with more freedom, but he was of too timid a temper to attempt to contravene established prejudices. His reply to one who censured him for making Hippolyte in love, in his Phèdre, is well known: "What would our *petits-maîtres* have said had I omitted it?" Voltaire, although possessed of a more enterprising and revolutionary spirit, left the essential principles of the drama as he found them. His multifarious criticisms exhibit a perpetual paradox. His general principles are ever at variance with their particular application. No one lauds more highly the scientific system of his countrymen; witness his numerous dramatic prefaces, dedications, and articles in the encyclopædia. He even refines upon it with hypercritical acumen, as in his commentaries on Corneille. But when he feels its

tyrannical pressure on himself, he is sure to wince; see, for example, his lamentable protest in his Preface to Brutus.

Alfieri acknowledged the paramount authority of the ancients equally with the French dramatic writers. He has but thrice violated the unity of place, and very rarely that of time; but, with all his deference for antiquity, the Italian poet has raised himself far above the narrow code of French criticism. He has relieved tragedy from that eternal chime of love-sick damsels, so indispensable in a French piece that, as Voltaire informs us, out of four hundred which had appeared before his time, there were not more than twelve which did not turn upon love. He substituted in its place a more pure and exalted sentiment. It will be difficult to find, even in Racine, such beautiful personifications of female loveliness as his Electra and Micol, to name no others. He has, moreover, dispensed with the *confidantes,* those insipid shadows that so invariably walk the round of the French stage. Instead of insulated axioms and long rhetorical pleadings, he has introduced a brisk, moving dialogue; and instead of the ceremonious breeding, the *perruque* and *chapeau bordé,* of Louis the Fourteenth's court, his personages, to borrow an allusion from a sister art, are sculptured with the bold natural freedom which distinguishes the school of Michael Angelo.

It is true that they are apt to show too much of the same fierce and sarcastic temper, too much of a family likeness with himself and with one another; that he sometimes mistakes passion for poetry;

that he has left this last too naked of imagery and rhetorical ornament; that he is sometimes stilted when he would be dignified; and that his affected energy is too often carried into mere muscular contortions. His system has, indeed, the appearance of an aspiration after some ideal standard of excellence which he could not wholly attain. It is sufficient proof of his power, however, that he succeeded in establishing it, in direct opposition to the ancient taste of his countrymen, to their love of poetic imagery, of verbal melody, and voluptuousness of sentiment. It is the triumph of genius over the prejudices, and even the constitutional feelings, of a nation.

We have dwelt thus long on Alfieri, because, like Dante, he seems himself to constitute a separate department in Italian literature. It is singular that the two poets who present the earliest and the latest models of surpassing excellence in this literature should bear so few of its usual characteristics. Alfieri's example has effected a decided revolution in the theatrical taste of his countrymen. It has called forth the efforts of some of their most gifted minds. Monti, perhaps the most eminent of this school, surpasses him in the graces of an easy and brilliant elocution, but falls far below him in energy of conception and character. The stoical system of Alfieri would seem, indeed, better adapted to his own peculiar temperament than to that of his nation; and the successful experiment of Manzoni in discarding the unities, and otherwise relaxing the unnatural rigidity of this system, would appear to be much better suited to the popular taste as well as talent.

Our limits, necessarily far too scanty for our subject, will not allow us to go into the Opera and the Pastoral Drama, two beautiful divisions in this department of Italian letters. It is singular that the former, notwithstanding the natural sensibility of the Italians to harmony, and the melody of their language, which almost sets itself to music as it is spoken, should have been so late in coming to its perfection under Metastasio. Nothing can be more unfair than to judge of this author, or, indeed, of any composer of operas, by the effect produced on us in the closet. Their pieces are intended to be exhibited, not read. The sentimental *ariettes* of the heroes, the romantic bombast of the heroines, the racks, ropes, poisoned daggers, and other fee-faw-fum of a nursery tale, so plentifully besprinkled over them, have certainly, in the closet, a very *fade* and ridiculous aspect; but an opera should be considered as an appeal to the senses by means of the illusions of music, dancing, and decorations. The poetry, wit, sentiment, intrigue, are mere accessories, and of value only as they may serve to promote this illusion. Hence the necessity of love,—love, the vivifying principle of the opera, the only passion in perfect accordance with its voluptuous movements. Hence the propriety of exhibiting character in exaggerated color of light and shadow, the *chiar'-oscuro* of poetry, as the imagination is most forcibly affected by powerful contrast. Yet this has been often condemned in Metastasio. On the above principle, too, the seasonable disclosures, miraculous escapes, and all the other magical apparatus before alluded to,

may be defended. The mind of the spectator, highly stimulated through the medium of the senses, requires a corresponding extravagance, if we may so say, in the creations of the poet. In this state, a veracious copy of nature would fall flat and powerless; to reach the heart, it must be raised into gigantic proportions, and adorned with a brighter flush of coloring than is to be found in real life. As a work of art, then, but not as a purely intellectual exhibition, we may criticise the opera, and, in this view of it, the peculiarities so often condemned in the artist may be, perhaps, sufficiently justified.

The Pastoral Drama, that attempt to shadow forth the beautiful absurdities of a golden age, claims to be invented by the Italians. It was carried to its ultimate perfection in two of its earliest specimens, the poems of Tasso and Guarini. Both these writers have adorned their subject with the highest charms of versification and imagery. Wth Tasso all this seems to proceed spontaneously from the heart, while Guarini's " Pastor Fido," on the other hand, has the appearance of being elaborated with the nicest preparation. It may, in truth, be regarded as the solitary monument of his genius, and as such he seems to have been desirous to concentrate within it every possible variety of excellence. During his whole life he was employed in retouching and enriching it with new beauties. This great variety and finish of details somewhat impair its unity, and give it too much the appearance of a curious collection of specimens. Yet there are those, and very compe-

tent critics too, who prefer the splendid patchwork of Guarini to the sweet, unsolicited beauties of his rival. Dr. Johnson has condemned both the Aminta and Pastor Fido as "trifles easily imitated and unworthy of imitation." The Italians have not found them so. Out of some hundred specimens cited by Serassi, only three or four are deemed by him worthy of notice. An English critic should have shown more charity for a kind of composition that has given rise to some of the most exquisite creations of Fletcher and Milton.

We have now reviewed the most important branches of the ornamental literature of the Italians. We omit some others, less conspicuous, or not essentially differing in their characteristics from similar departments in the literatures of other European nations. An exception may perhaps be made in favor of satirical writing, which, with the Italians, assumes a peculiar form, and one quite indicative of the national genius. Satire, in one shape or another, has been a great favorite with them, from Ariosto, or, indeed, we may say Dante, to the present time. It is, for the most part, of a light, vivacious character, rather playful than pointed. Their critics, with their usual precision, have subdivided it into a great variety of classes, among which the *Bernesque* is the most original. This epithet, derived not, as some have supposed, from the *rifacimento* but from the Capitoli of Berni, designates a style of writing compounded of the beautiful and the burlesque, of which it is nearly impossible to convey an adequate notion, either by translation or description, in a

foreign language. Even so mature a scholar as Mr. Roscoe has failed to do this, when, in one of his histories, he compares this manner to that of Peter Pindar, and in the other to that of Sterne. But the Italian has neither the coarse diction of the former nor the sentiment of the latter. It is generally occupied with some frivolous topic, to which it ascribes the most extravagant properties, descanting on it through whole pages of innocent irony, and clothing the most vulgar and oftentimes obscene ideas in the polished phrase or idiomatic graces of expression that never fail to disarm an Italian critic. A foreigner, however, not so sensible to the seductions of style, will scarcely see in it anything more than a puerile debauch of fancy.

Historians are fond of distributing the literature of Italy into masses, chronologically arranged in successive centuries. The successive revolutions in this literature justify the division to a degree unknown in that of any other country, and a brief illustration of it may throw some additional light on our subject.

Thus the fourteenth century, the age of the *trecentisti,* as it is called, the age of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, is the period of high and original invention. These three great writers, who are alone capable of attracting our attention at this distance of time, were citizens of a free state, and were early formed to the contemplation and practice of public virtue. Hence their works manifest an independence and a generous self-confidence that we seek in vain in the productions of a later period, forced in the artificial atmosphere of a court.

Their writings are marked, moreover, by a depth of reflection not to be discerned in the poets of a similar period of antiquity, the pioneers of the civilization of their times. The human mind was then in its infancy; but in the fourteenth century it seemed to awake from the slumber of ages, with powers newly invigorated, and a memory stored with the accumulated wisdom of the past. Compare, for example, the Divine Comedy with the poems of Homer and Hesiod, and observe how much superior to these latter writers is the Italian in moral and intellectual science as well as in those higher speculations which relate to our ultimate destiny.* The rhetorical beauties of the great works of the fourteenth century have equally contributed to their permanent popularity and influence. While the early productions of other countries, the poems of the Niebelungen, of the Cid, of the Norman *trouveurs,* and those of Chaucer, even, have passed, in consequence of their colloquial barbarisms, into a certain degree of oblivion, the writings of the *trecentisti* are still revered as the models of purity and elegance, to be forever imitated, though never equalled.

The following age exhibits the reverse of all this. It was as remarkable for the general diffusion of learning as the preceding had been for the concentration of talent. The Italian, which had been so successfully cultivated, came to be univer-

* Hesiod, it is true, has digested a compact body of ethics, wonderfully mature for the age in which he wrote; but the best of it is disfigured with those childish superstitions which betray the twilight of civilization. See, in particular, the concluding portion of his Works and Days.

sally neglected for the ancient languages. It would seem as if the soil, exhausted by too abundant harvests, must lie fallow another century before it could be capable of reproduction. The scholars of that day disdained any other than the Latin tongue for the medium of their publications, or even of their private epistolary correspondence. They thought, with Waller, that

> "Those who lasting marble seek
> Must carve in Latin or in Greek."

But the marble has crumbled into dust, while the natural beauties of their predecessors are still green in the memory of their countrymen. To make use of a simile which Dr. Young applied to Ben Jonson, they "pulled down, like Samson, the temple of antiquity on their shoulders, and buried themselves under its ruins."

But let us not err by despising these men as a race of unprofitable pedants. They lived on the theatre of ancient art, in an age when new discoveries were daily making of the long-lost monuments of intellectual and material beauty, and it is no wonder that, dazzled with the contemplation of these objects, they should have been blind to the modest merits of their contemporaries. We should be grateful to men whose indefatigable labors preserved for us the perishable remains of classic literature, and who thus opened a free and familiar converse with the great minds of antiquity; and we may justly feel some degree of reverence for the enthusiasm of an age in which the scholar was willing to exchange his learned leisure for pain-

ful and perilous pilgrimages, when the merchant was content to barter his rich freights for a few mouldering, worm-eaten folios, and when the present of a single manuscript was deemed of sufficient value to heal the dissensions of two rival states. Such was the fifteenth century in Italy; and Tiraboschi, warming as he approaches it, in his preface to the sixth volume of his history, has accordingly invested it with more than his usual blaze of panegyric.

The genius of the Italians, however, was sorely fettered by their adoption of an ancient idiom, and, like Tasso's Erminia when her delicate form was enclosed in the iron mail of the warrior, lost its elasticity and grace. But at the close of the century the Italian muse was destined to regain her natural freedom in the court of Lorenzo de' Medici. His own compositions, especially, are distinguished by a romantic sweetness, and his light popular pieces,—Carnascialeschi, Contadineschi,—so abundantly imitated since, have a buoyant, exhilarating air, wholly unlike the pedantic tone of his age. Under these new auspices, however, the Italian received a very different complexion from that which had been imparted to it by the hand of Dante.

The sixteenth century is the healthful, the Augustan age of Italian letters. The conflicting principles of an ancient and a modern school are, however, to be traced throughout almost the whole course of it. A curious passage from Varchi, who flourished about the middle of this century, informs us that when he was at school it was the

custom of the instructors to interdict to their pupils the study of any vernacular writer, even Dante and Petrarch.* Hence the Latin came to be cultivated almost equally with the Italian, and both, singularly enough, attained simultaneously their full development.

There are few phrases more inaccurately applied than that of the "Age of Leo X.," to whose brief pontificate we are accustomed to refer most of the magnificent creations of genius scattered over the sixteenth century, although very few, even of those produced in his own reign, can be imputed to his influence. The nature of this influence in regard to Italian letters may even admit of question. His early taste led him to give an almost exclusive attention to the ancient classics. The great poets of that century, Ariosto, Sannazaro, the Tassos, Rucellai, Guarini, and the rest, produced their immortal works far from Leo's court. Even Bembo, the oracle of his day, retired in disgust from his patron, and composed his principal writings in his retreat. Ariosto, his ancient friend, he coldly neglected,† while he pensioned the infamous Aretin. He surrounded his table with buffoon literati and parasitical poets, who amused him with feats of improvisation, gluttony, and intemperance, some of whom, after expending on them his convivial wit, he turned over to public derision, and most of whom, debauched in morals and constitution, were abandoned, under

* Ercolano, Ques. VIII.

† Roscoe attempts to explain away the conduct of Leo; but the satires of the poet furnish a bitter commentary upon it, not to be misunderstood.

his austere successor, to infamy and death. He collected about him such court-flies as Berni and Molza; but, as if the papal atmosphere were fatal to high continued effort, even Berni, like Trissino and Rucellai, could find no leisure for his more elaborate performance till after his patron's death. He magnificently recompensed his musical retainers, making one an archbishop, another an archdeacon; but what did he do for his countryman Machiavelli, the philosopher of his age?* He hunted, and hawked, and caroused; every thing was a jest; and while the nations of Europe stood aghast at the growing heresy of Luther, the merry pontiff and his ministers found strange matter of mirth in witnessing the representation of comedies that exposed the impudent mummeries of priestcraft. With such an example, and under such an influence, it is no wonder that nothing better should have been produced than burlesque satire, licentious farces, and frivolous impromptus. Contrast all this with the elegant recreations of the little court of Urbino, as described in the Cortegiano; or compare the whole result on Italian letters of the so much vaunted patronage of this luxurious pontiff with the splendid achievements of the petty state of Este alone during the first half of this century, and it will appear that there are few misnomers which convey grosser misconceptions than that of the "Age of Leo X."

The seventeenth century (*seicento*) is one of

* Machiavelli, after having suffered torture on account of a suspected conspiracy against the Medici, in which his participation was never proved, was allowed to linger out his days in poverty and disgrace.

humiliation in the literary annals of Italy; one in which the Muse, like some dilapidated beauty, endeavored to supply the loss of natural charms by all the aids of coquetry and meretricious ornament. It is the prodigal use of "these false brilliants," as Boileau terms them, in some of their best writers, which has brought among foreigners an undeserved discredit on the whole body of Italian letters, and which has made the condemned age of the *seicentisti* a by-word of reproach even with their own countrymen. The principles of a corrupt taste are, however, to be discerned at an earlier period, in the writings of Tasso especially, and still more of Guarini; but it was reserved for Marini to reduce them into a system, and by his popularity and foreign residence to diffuse the infection among the other nations of Europe. To this source, therefore, most of these nations have agreed to refer the impurities which at one time or another have disfigured their literatures. Thus the Spaniard Lampillas has mustered an array of seven volumes to prove the charge of original corruption on the Italians, though Marini openly affected to have formed himself upon a Spanish model.* In like manner, La Harpe imputes to them the sins of Jodelle and the contemporary wits, though these last preceded by some years the literary existence of Marini; and the vices of the English *metaphysical* school have been expressly referred by Dr. Johnson to Marini and his followers.

A nearer inspection, however, might justify the

* Obras sueltas de Lope de Vega, tom. xxi. p. 17.

opinion that these various affectations bear too much of the physiognomy of the respective nations in which they are found, and are capable of being traced to too high a source in each, to be thus exclusively imputed to the Italians. Thus the elements of the *cultismo* of the Spaniards, that compound of flat pedantry and Oriental hyperbole, so different from the fine *concetti* of the Italian, are to be traced through some of their most eminent writers up to the fugitive pieces of the fifteenth century, as collected in their Cancioneros; and, in like manner, the elements of the metaphysical jargon of Cowley, whose intellectual combinations and far-fetched analogies show too painful a research after wit for the Italian taste, may be traced in England through Donne and Ben Jonson, to say nothing of the "unparalleled John Lillie," up to the veteran versifiers of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries. Thus, also, some features of the *style précieux* of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, so often lashed by Boileau and laughed at by Molière, may be imputed to the malign influence of the constellation of pedants celebrated in France under the title of Pleiades, in the sixteenth century.

The Greek is the only literature which from the first seems to have maintained a sound and healthful state. In every other, the barbaric love of ornament, so discernible even in the best of the earlier writers, has been chastised only by long and assiduous criticism; but the principle of corruption still remains, and the season of perfect ripeness seems to be only that of the commence-

ment of decay. Thus it was in Italy in the perverted age of the *seicentisti,* an age yet warm with the productions of an Ariosto and a Tasso.

The literature of the Italians assumed in the last century a new and highly improved aspect. With less than its usual brilliancy of imagination, it displayed an intensity, and, under the circumstances in which it has been produced, we may add, intrepidity of thought quite worthy of the great spirits of the fourteenth century, and a freedom and nature in its descriptions altogether opposed to the heartless affectations of the seventeenth. The prejudicial influence of their neighbors threatened at one time, indeed, to precipitate the language into a French *machéronico;* but a counter-current, equally exclusive, in favor of the *trecentisti,* contributed to check the innovation and to carry them back to the ancient models of purity and vigor. The most eminent writers of this period seem to have formed themselves on Dante, in particular, as studiously as those of the preceding age affected the more effeminate graces of Petrarch. Among these, Monti, who, in the language of his master, may be truly said to have inherited from him "Lo bello stile, che l'ha fatto onore," is thought most nearly to resemble Dante in the literary execution of his verses; while Alfieri, Parini, and Foscolo approach him still nearer in the rugged virtue and independence of their sentiments. There seems to be a didactic import in much of the poetry of this age, too, and, in its descriptions of external nature, a sober, contemplative vein, that may remind us of writers in

our own language. Indeed, an English influence is clearly discernible in some of the most eminent poets of this period, who have either visited Great Britain in person or made themselves familiar with its language.* The same influence may be, perhaps, recognized in the moral complexion of many of their compositions, the most elegant specimen of which is probably Parini's satire, which disguises the sarcasm of Cowper in the rich, embroidered verse which belongs to the Italians.

In looking back on the various branches of literature which we have been discussing, we are struck with the almost exclusive preference given to poetry over prose, with the great variety of beautiful forms which the former exhibits, with its finished versification, its inexhaustible inventions, and a wit that never tires. But in all this admirable mechanism we too often feel the want of an informing soul, of a nobler, or, at least, some more practical object than mere amusement. Their writers too rarely seem to feel

> "Divinity within them, breeding wings
> Wherewith to spurn the earth."

They have gone beyond every other people in painting the intoxication of voluptuous passion; but how rarely have they exhibited it in its purer and more ethereal form! How rarely have they built up their dramatic or epic fables on national or patriotic recollections! Even satire, disarmed of its moral sting, becomes in their hands a barren,

* Among these may be mentioned Monti, Pindemonte, Cesarotti, Mazza, Alfieri, Pignotti, and Foscolo.

though perhaps a brilliant, jest,—the harmless electricity of a summer sky.

The peculiar inventions of a people best show their peculiar genius. The romantic epic has assumed with the Italians a perfectly original form, in which, stripped of the fond illusions of chivalry, it has descended, through all the gradations of mirth, from well-bred raillery to broad and bald buffoonery. In the same merry vein their various inventions in the burlesque style have been conceived. Whole cantos of these puerilities have been strung together with a patience altogether unrivalled except by that of their indefatigable commentators.* Even the most austere intellects of the nation, a Machiavelli and a Galileo, for example, have not disdained to revel in this frivolous debauch of fancy, and may remind one of Michael Angelo, at the instance of Pietro de' Medici, employing his transcendent talents in sculpturing a perishable statue of snow!

The general scope of our vernacular literature, as contrasted with that of the Italian, will set the peculiarities of the latter in a still stronger light. In the English, the drama and the novel, which may be considered as its staples, aiming at more than a vulgar interest, have always been made the theatre of a scientific dissection of character. Instead of the romping merriment of the *novelle*, it is furnished with those periodical essays which, in the form of apologue, of serious disquisition or criticism, convey to us lessons of practical wisdom.

* The annotations upon Lippi's burlesque poem of the Malmantile Racquistata are inferior in bulk to those only on the Divine Comedy.

Its pictures of external nature have been deepened by a sober contemplation not familiar to the mercurial fancy of the Italians. Its biting satire, from Piers Plowman's Visions to the Baviad and Mæviad of our day, instead of breaking into vapid jests, has been sharpened against the follies or vices of the age, and the body of its poetry, in general, from the days of "moralle Gower" to those of Cowper and Wordsworth, breathes a spirit of piety and unsullied virtue. Even Spenser deemed it necessary to shroud the eccentricities of his Italian imagination in sober allegory; and Milton, while he adopted in his Comus the beautiful and somewhat luxurious form of the Aminta and Pastor Fido, animated it with the most devotional sentiments.

The political situation of Italy may afford a key to some of the peculiarities of her literature. Oppressed by foreign or domestic tyrants for more than five centuries, she has been condemned, in the indignant language of her poet,

"Per servir sempre, o vincitrice o vinta."

Her citizens, excluded from the higher walks of public action, have too often resigned themselves to corrupt and effeminate pleasure, and her writers, inhibited from the free discussion of important topics, have too frequently contented themselves with an impotent play of fancy. The histories of Machiavelli and of Guicciardini were not permitted to be published entire until the conclusion of the last century. The writings of Alemanni, from some umbrage given to the Medici,

were burned by the hands of the common hangman. Marchetti's elegant version of Lucretius was long prohibited on the ground of its epicurean philosophy, and the learned labors of Giannone were recompensed with exile. Under such a government, it is wonderful that so many rather than so few writers should have been found with intrepidity sufficient to raise the voice of unwelcome truth. It is not to be wondered at that they should have produced so few models of civil or sacred eloquence, the fruit of a happier and more enlightened system; that they should have been too exclusively devoted to mere beauties of form, have been more solicitous about style than thought, have studied rather to amuse than to instruct. Hence the superabundance of their philological treatises and mere verbal criticisms, of their tomes of commentaries with which they have illustrated or obscured their most insignificant poets, where a verse furnishes matter for a lecture, and a *canzone* becomes the text for a volume. This is no exaggeration.* Hence, too, the frequency and ferocity of their literary quarrels, into which the Italians, excluded too often from weightier disquisition, enter with an enthusiasm which in other nations can be roused only by the dearest interests of humanity. The comparative merit of some obscure classic, the orthography of some obsolete term, a simple sonnet, even, has been sufficient to

* Benedetto of Ravenna wrote ten lectures on the fourth sonnet of Petrarch; Pico della Mirandola devoted three whole books to the illustration of a *canzone* of his friend Benivieni; and three Arcadians published a volume in defence of the *Tre Sorelle* of Petrarch! It would be easy to multiply similar examples of critical prodigality.

throw the whole community into a ferment, in which the parties have not always confined themselves to a war of words.

The influence of academies on Italian literature is somewhat doubtful. They have probably contributed to nourish that epicurean sensibility to mere verbal elegance so conspicuous in the nation. The great variety of these institutions scattered over every remote district of the country, the whimsicality of their titles, and still more of those of their members, have an air sufficiently ridiculous.* Some of them have been devoted to the investigation of science. But a license refused to individuals will hardly be conceded to public associations; and the persecution of some of the most eminent has proved an effectual warning to confine their speculations within the inoffensive sphere of literary criticism. Hence the exuberance of *prose* and *lezioni,* endless dissertations on barren rhetorical topics, and those vapid attempts at academic wit, which should never have transcended the bounds of the Lyceum.

It is not in such institutions that the great intellectual efforts of a nation are displayed. All that any academy can propose to itself is to keep alive the flame which genius has kindled; and in more than one instance they have gone near to smother it. The French Academy, as is well known, opened

* Take at hazard some of the most familiar, the "Ardent," the "Frozen," the "Wet," the "Dry," the "Stupid," the "Lazy." The Cruscan takes its name from Crusca (bran); and its members adopted the corresponding epithets of "brown bread," "white bread," "the kneaded," etc. Some of the Italians, as Lasca, La Bindo, for instance, are better known by their frivolous academic names than by their own.

its career with its celebrated attack upon Corneille; and the earliest attempt of the Cruscan was upon Tasso's Jerusalem, which it compelled its author to remodel, or, in other words, to reduce, by the extraction of its essential spirit, into a flat and insipid decoction. Denina has sarcastically intimated that the era of the foundation of this latter academy corresponds exactly with that of the commencement of the decline of good taste. More liberal critics concede, however, that this body has done much to preserve the integrity of the tongue, and that a pure spirit of criticism was kept alive within its bosom when it had become extinct in almost every other part of Italy.* Their philological labors have, in truth, been highly valuable, though perhaps not so completely successful as those of the French academicians. We do not allude to any capricious principle on which their vocabulary may have been constructed,—an affair of their own critics,—but to the fact that, after all, they have not been able to settle the language with the same precision and uniformity with which it has been done in France, from the want of some great metropolis, like Paris, whose authority would be received as paramount throughout the country. No such universal deference has been paid to the Cruscan academy; and the Italian language, far from being accurately determined, is even too loose and inexact for the common purposes of business. Perhaps it is for this very reason better adapted to the ideal purposes of poetry.

* See, in particular, the treatise of Parini, himself a Lombard, De' Principi delle Belle Lettere, part ii. cap. v.

The exquisite mechanism of the Italian tongue, made up of the very elements of music, and picturesque in its formation beyond that of any other living language, is undoubtedly a cause of the exaggerated consequence imputed to style by the writers of the nation. The author of the Dialogue on Orators points out, as one of the symptoms of depraved eloquence in Rome, that "voluptuous artificial harmony of cadence, which is better suited to the purposes of the musician or the dancer than of the orator." The same vice has infected Italian prose from its earliest models, from Boccaccio and Bembo down to the most ordinary book-wright of the present day, who hopes to disguise his poverty of thought under his melodious redundancy of diction. Hence it is that their numerous Letters, Dialogues, and their specimens of written eloquence are too often defective both in natural force and feeling. Even in those graver productions which derive almost their sole value from their facts, they are apt to be far more solicitous about style and ingenious turns of thought, as one of their own critics has admitted, than either utility or sound philosophy.*

A principal cause, after all, of the various peculiarities of Italian literature, of which we have been speaking, is to be traced to that fine perception of the beautiful, so inherent in every order of the nation, whether it proceed from a happier physical organization, or from an early familiarity with those models of idcal beauty by which they are everywhere surrounded. Whoever has visited

* Bettinelli, Risorgimento d'Italia, Introd., p. 14.

Italy must have been struck with a sensibility to elegant pleasure, and a refinement of taste, in the very lowest classes, that in other countries belong only to the more cultivated. This is to be discerned in the most trifling particulars; in their various costume, whose picturesque arrangement seems to have been studied from the models of ancient statuary; in the flowers and other tasteful ornaments with which, on *fête*-days, they decorate their chapels and public temples; in the eagerness with which the peasant and the artisan, after their daily toil, resort to the theatre, the opera, or similar intellectual amusements, instead of the bear-baitings, bull-fights, and drunken orgies so familiar to the populace of other countries; and in the quiet rapture with which they listen for hours, in the public squares, to the strains of an *improvisatore* or the recitations of a story-teller, without any other refreshment than a glass of water. Even the art of improvisation, carried to such perfection by the Italians, is far less imputable to the facilities of their verse than to the poetical genius of the people; an evidence of which is the abundance of *improvisatori* in Latin in the sixteenth century, when that language came to be widely cultivated.

It is time, however, to conclude our remarks, which have already encroached too liberally on the patience of our readers. Notwithstanding our sincere admiration, as generally expressed, for the beautiful literature of Italy, we fear that some of our reflections may be unpalatable to a people who shrink with sensitive delicacy from the rude touch

of foreign criticism. The most liberal opinions of a foreigner, it is true, coming through so different a medium of prejudice and taste, must always present a somewhat distorted aspect to the eye of a native. On those finer shades of expression which constitute, indeed, much of the value of poetry, none but a native can pronounce with accuracy; but on its intellectual and moral character a foreign critic is better qualified to decide. He may be more perspicacious, even, than a native, in detecting those obliquities from a correct standard of taste, to which the latter has been reconciled by prejudice and long example, or which he may have learned to reverence as beauties.

There must be so many exceptions, too, to the sweeping range of any general criticism, that it will always carry with it a certain air of injustice. Thus, while we object to the Italians the diluted, redundant style of their compositions, may they not refer us to their versions of Tacitus and Perseus, the most condensed writers in the most condensed language in the world, in a form equally compact with that of the originals? May they not object to us Dante and Alfieri, scarcely capable of translation into any modern tongue, in the same compass, without a violence to idiom? And may they not cite the same hardy models in refutation of an unqualified charge of effeminacy? Where shall we find examples of purer and more exalted sentiment than in the writings of Petrarch and Tasso? Where of a more chastised composition than in Casa or Caro? And where more pertinent examples of a didactic aim than in their

numerous poetical treatises on husbandry, manufactures, and other useful arts, which in other countries form the topics of bulky disquisitions in prose? This is all just. But such exceptions, however imposing, in no way contravene the general truth of our positions, founded on the *prevalent* tone and characteristics of Italian literature.

Let us not, however, appear insensible to the merits of a literature pre-eminent above all others for activity of fancy and beautiful variety of form, or to those of a country so fruitful in interesting recollections to the scholar and the artist; in which the human mind has displayed its highest energies untired through the longest series of ages; on which the light of science shed its parting ray, and where it first broke again upon the nations; whose history is the link that connects the past with the present, the ancient with the modern, and whose enterprising genius enlarged the boundaries of the Old World by the discovery of a New; whose scholars opened to mankind the intellectual treasures of antiquity; whose schools first expounded those principles of law which have become the basis of jurisprudence in most of the civilized nations of Europe; whose cities gave the earliest example of free institutions, and, when the vision of liberty had passed away, maintained their empire over the mind by those admirable productions of art that revive the bright period of Grecian glory; and who, even now that her palaces are made desolate and her vineyards trodden down under the foot of the stranger, retains within her bosom all the fire of ancient genius. It would

show a strange insensibility indeed did we not sympathize in the fortunes of a nation that has manifested, in such a variety of ways, the highest intellectual power; of which we may exclaim, in the language which a modern poet has applied to one of the most beautiful of her cities,

"O Decus, O Lux
Ausoniæ, per quam libera turba sumus,
Per quam Barbaries nobis non imperat, et Sol
Exoriens nostro clarius orbe nitet!"

SCOTTISH SONG *

(July, 1826)

IT is remarkable that poetry, which is esteemed so much more difficult than prose among cultivated people, should universally have been the form which man in the primitive stages of society, has adopted for the easier development of his ideas. It may be that the infancy of nations, like that of individuals, is more taken up with imagination and sentiment than with reasoning, and is thus instinctively led to verse, as best suited, by its sweetness and harmony, to the expression of passionate thought. It may be, too, that the refinements of modern criticism have multiplied rather than relieved the difficulties of the art. The ancient poet poured forth his *carmina incondita* with no other ambition than that of accommodating them to the natural music of his own ear, careless of the punctilious observances which the fastidious taste of a polished age so peremptorily demands. However this may be, it is certain that poetry is more ancient than prose in the records of every nation, and that this poetry is found in its earliest stages almost always allied with music. Thus the Rhapsodies of Homer were chanted to the sound of the lyre by the wandering bards of Ionia;

* "The Songs of Scotland, Ancient and Modern, with an Introduction and Notes, Historical and Critical, and the Characters of the Lyric Poets. By Allan Cunningham." In four volumes. London, 1825. 12mo.

thus the citharœdi of the ancient Romans, the Welsh harper, the Saxon gleeman, the Scandinavian scald, and the Norman minstrel, soothed the sensual appetites of an unlettered age by the more exalted charms of poetry and music. This precocious poetical spirit seems to have been more widely diffused among the modern than the ancient European nations. The astonishing perfection of the Homeric epics makes it probable, it is true, that there must have been previously a diligent cultivation of the divine art among the natives.*

The introduction of the bards Phemius and Demodocus into the Odyssey shows also that minstrelsy had long been familiar to Homer's countrymen. This, however, is but conjecture, as no undisputed fragments of this early age have come down to us. The Romans, we know, were not till a very late period moved by the *impetus sacer*. One or two devotional chants and a few ribald satires are all that claim to be antiquities in their prosaic literature.

It was far otherwise with the nations of modern Europe. Whether the romantic institutions of the age, or the warmth of classic literature not wholly extinguished, awakened this general enthusiasm, we know not; but no sooner had the thick darkness which for centuries had settled over the nations begun to dissipate, than the voice of song was heard in the remotest corners of Europe, where heathen civilization had never ventured,—from the

* "Nec dubitari debet quin fuerint ante Homerum poetæ." Cic., Brut., 18.

frozen isles of Britain and Scandinavia, no less than from the fertile shores of Italy and Provence. We do not mean that the light of song was totally extinguished, even at the darkest period. It may be faintly discerned in the barbaric festivals of Attila, himself the theme of more than one venerable German romance; and, at a later period, in the comparatively refined courts of Alfred and Charlemagne.

But it was not until the eleventh or twelfth century that refinement of taste was far advanced among the nations of Europe; that, in spite of all the obstacles of a rude, unconcocted dialect, the foundations and the forms of their poetical literature were cast, which, with some modification, they have retained ever since. Of these, the ballads may be considered as coming more immediately from the body of the people. In no country did they take such deep root as in Spain and Scotland, and, although cultivated more or less by all the Northern nations, yet nowhere else have they had the good fortune, by their own intrinsic beauty, and by the influence they have exerted over the popular character, to constitute so important a part of the national literature. The causes of this are to be traced to the political relations of these countries. Spain, divided into a number of petty principalities, which contended with each other for pre-eminence, was obliged to carry on a far more desperate struggle for existence, as well as religion, with its Saracen invaders; who, after advancing their victorious crescent from the Arabian desert to the foot of the Pyrenees, had estab-

lished a solid empire over the fairest portions of the Peninsula. Seven long centuries was the ancient Spaniard reclaiming, inch by inch, this conquered territory; thus a perpetual crusade was carried on, and the fertile fields of Andalusia and Granada became the mimic theatre of exploits similar to those performed by the martial enthusiasts of Europe, on a much greater scale, indeed, on the plains of Palestine. The effect of all this was to infuse into their popular compositions a sort of devotional heroism, which is to be looked for in vain in any other. The existence of the Cid so early as the eleventh century was a fortunate event for Spanish poetry. The authenticated actions of that chief are so nearly allied to the marvellous that, like Charlemagne, he forms a convenient nucleus for the manifold fictions in which successive bards have enveloped him. The ballads relating to this doughty hero have been collected into a sort of patchwork epic, whose fabrication thus resembles that imputed to those ancient poems which some modern critics have determined to be but a tissue of rhapsodies executed by different masters. But, without comparing them with the epics of Homer in symmetry of design or perfection of versification, we may reasonably claim for them a moral elevation not inferior, and a tone of courtesy and generous gallantry altogether unknown to the heroes of the Iliad.

The most interesting of the Spanish ballads are those relating to the Moors. This people, now so degraded in every intellectual and moral aspect, were, as is well known, in the ninth and tenth

centuries the principal depositaries of useful science and elegant art. This is particularly true of the Spanish caliphate; and more than one Christian prelate is on record who, in a superstitious age, performed a literary pilgrimage to the schools of Córdova, and drank from these profane sources of wisdom. The peculiarities of Oriental costume, their showy military exercises, their perilous bull-feasts and cane-fights, their chivalric defiance and rencounters with the Christian knights on the plains before the assembled city, their brilliant revels, romantic wooings, and midnight serenades, afforded rich themes for the muse; above all, the capture and desolation of Granada, that "city without peer," the "pride of heathendom," on which the taste and treasures of the Western caliphs had been lavished for seven centuries, are detailed in a tone of melancholy grandeur, which comes over us like the voice of an expiring nation.*

One trait has been pointed out in these poems most honorable to the Spanish character, and in which, in later times, it has been lamentably deficient, that of religious toleration: we find none of the fierce bigotry which armed the iron hand of the Inquisition; which coolly condemned to exile

* An ancient Arabian writer concludes a florid eulogium on the architecture and local beauties of Granada in the fourteenth century, with likening it, in Oriental fashion, to "a richly-wrought vase of silver, filled with jacinths and emeralds." (Historia de los Arabes de España, tom. iii. p. 147.) Among the ballads relating to the Moorish wars, two of the most beautiful are the "Lament over Alhama," indifferently translated by Byron, and that beginning with "En la ciudad de Granada," rendered by Lockhart with his usual freedom and vivacity. Hita, i. 464, and Depping, 240.

or the stake a numerous native population for an honest difference of religious opinion, and desolated with fire and sword the most flourishing of their Christian provinces.

The ancient Spaniard, on the contrary, influenced by a more enlightened policy, as well as by humanity, contracted familiar intimacies, nay, even matrimonial alliances, with his Mohammedan rivals, and the proudest of their nobles did not disdain, in an honest cause, to fight under the banners of the Infidel. It would be a curious study to trace the progress and the causes of this pitiable revolution in national feeling.

The Spaniards have good reason to cherish their ancient ballads, for nowhere is the high Castilian character displayed to such advantage,—haughty, it is true, jealous of insult, and without the tincture of letters which throws a lustre over the polished court of Charles and Philip, but also without the avarice, the insatiable cruelty, and dismal superstition which deface the bright page of their military renown.* The Cid † himself, whose authentic history may vindicate the hyper-

* Sufficient evidence of this may be found in works of imagination, as well as the histories of the period. The plays of Lope de Vega, for instance, are filled with all manner of perfidy and assassination, which takes place as a matter of course, and without the least compunction. In the same spirit, the barbarous excesses of his countrymen in South America are detailed by Ercilla, in his historical epic, *La Araucana*. The flimsy pretext of conscience, for which these crimes are perpetrated, cannot veil their enormity from any but the eyes of the offender.

† The Cid of history and the Cid of romance are two entirely distinct persons. The Cid of history was a free-booter, cruel, selfish and ambitious. The Cid of romance, the "Beau ideal of chivalry," patriotic, brave and self-sacrificing, is a creature whose legend was more than five hundred years in growing.—M.

bole of romance, was the *beau idéal* of chivalry.*

The peculiarities of early Scottish poetry may also be referred, in a great degree, to the political relations of the nation, which for many centuries was distracted by all the rancorous dissensions incident to the ill-balanced fabric of feudal government. The frequent and long regencies, always unfavorable to civil concord, multiplied the sources of jealousy, and armed with new powers the factious aristocracy. In the absence of legitimate authority, each baron sought to fortify himself by the increased number of his retainers, who, in their turn, willingly attached themselves to the fortunes of a chief who secured to them plunder and protection. Hence a system of clanship was organized, more perfect and more durable than has existed in any other country, which is not entirely effaced at the present day. To the nobles who garrisoned the Marches, still greater military powers were necessarily delegated for purposes of state defence, and the names of Home, Douglas, and Buccleuch make a far more frequent and important figure in national history than that of the reigning sovereign. Hence private feuds were inflamed and vindicated by national antipathies, and a pretext of patriotism

*The veracity of the traditionary history of the Cid, indeed, his existence, discussed and denied by Masdeu, in his Historia crítica de España, has been satisfactorily established by the learned Müller; and the conclusions of the latter writer are recently confirmed by Conde's posthumous publication of translated Arabian manuscripts of great antiquity, where the Cid is repeatedly mentioned as the chief known by the name of the Warrior, *el Campeador:* "the Cid whom Alla curse;" "the tyrant Cid;" "the accursed Cid," etc. See Historia de los Arabes de España, ii. 92.

was never wanting to justify perpetual hostility. Hence the scene of the old ballads was laid chiefly on the borders, and hence the minstrels of the "North Countrie" obtained such pre-eminence over their musical brethren.

The odious passion of revenge, which seems adapted by nature to the ardent temperaments of the South, but which even there has been mitigated by the spirit of Christianity, glowed with fierce heat in the bosoms of those Northern savages. An offence to the meanest individual was espoused by his whole clan, and was expiated, not by the blood of the offender only, but by that of his whole kindred. The sack of a peaceful castle and the slaughter of its sleeping inhabitants seem to have been as familiar occurrences to these Border heroes as the lifting of a drove of cattle, and attended with as little compunction. The following pious invocation, uttered on the eve of an approaching foray, may show the acuteness of their moral sensibility:

> "He that ordained us to be born
> Sent us mair meat for the morn.
> Come by right or come by wrang,
> Christ, let us not fast owre lang,
> But blithely spend what's gaily got.
> Ride, Rowland, bough 's i' the pot."

When superstition usurps the place of religion, there will be little morality among the people. The only law they knew was the command of their chief, and the only one he admitted was his sword. "By what right," said a Scottish prince to a marauding Douglas, "do you hold these lands?" "By that of my sword," he answered.

From these causes the early Scottish poetry is deeply tinged with a gloomy ferocity, and abounds in details of cool, deliberate cruelty. It is true that this is frequently set off, as in the fine old ballads of Chevy Chase and Auld Maitland, by such deeds of rude but heroic gallantry as, in the words of Sidney, "stir the soul like the sound of a trumpet." But, on the whole, although the scene of the oldest ballads is pitched as late as the fourteenth century, the manners they exhibit are not much superior, in point of refinement and humanity, to those of our own North American savages.*

From wanton or vindictive cruelty, especially when exercised on the defenceless or the innocent, the cultivated mind naturally shrinks with horror and disgust; but it was long ere the stern hearts of our English ancestors yielded to the soft impulses of mercy and benevolence. The reigns of the Norman dynasty are written in characters of fire and blood. As late as the conclusion of the fourteenth century, we find the Black Prince, the "flower of English knighthood," as Froissart styles him, superintending the butchery of three thousand unresisting captives, men, women, and children, who vainly clung to him for mercy. The general usage of surrendering as hostages their wives and children, whose members were mutilated or lives sacrificed on the least infraction of their engagements, is a still better evidence of the uni-

* For proof of this assertion, see "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border," and in particular the ballads of "Jellon Grame," "Young Benjie," "Lord William," "Duel of Wharton and Stuart," "Death of Featherstonehaugh," "Douglas Tragedy," etc.

versal barbarism of the so-much lauded age of chivalry.

Another trait in the old Scotch poetry, and of a very opposite nature from that we have been describing, is its occasional sensibility: touches of genuine pathos are found scattered among the cold, appalling passions of the age, like the flowers which, in Switzerland are said to bloom alongside the avalanche. No state of society is so rude as to extinguish the spark of natural affection; tenderness for our offspring is but a more enlarged selfishness, perfectly compatible with the utmost ferocity towards others. Hence scenes of parental and filial attachment are to be met with in these poems which cannot be read without emotion. The passion of love appears to have been a favorite study with the ancient English writers, and by none, in any language we have read, is it managed with so much art and feeling as by the dramatic writers of Queen Elizabeth's day. The Scottish minstrels, with less art, seem to be entitled to the praise of possessing an equal share of tenderness. In the Spanish ballad love glows with the fierce ardor of a tropical sun. The amorous serenader celebrates the beauties of his Zayda (the name which, from its frequency, would seem to be a general title for a Spanish mistress) in all the florid hyperbole of Oriental gallantry, or, as a disappointed lover, wanders along the banks of the Guadalete, imprecating curses on her head and vengeance on his devoted rival. The calm dejection and tender melancholy which are diffused over the Scottish love-songs are far more affecting

than all this turbulence of passion. The sensibility which, even in a rude age, seems to have characterized the Scottish maiden, was doubtless nourished by the solemn complexion of the scenery by which she was surrounded, by the sympathies continually awakened for her lover in his career of peril and adventure, and by the facilities afforded her for brooding over her misfortunes in the silence of rural solitude.

To similar physical causes may be principally referred those superstitions which are so liberally diffused over the poetry of Scotland down to the present day. The tendency of wild, solitary districts, darkened with mountains and extensive forests, to raise in the mind ideas of solemn, preternatural awe, has been noticed from the earliest ages. "Where is a lofty and deeply-shaded grove," writes Seneca, in one of his epistles, "filled with venerable trees, whose interlacing boughs shut out the face of heaven, the grandeur of the wood, the silence of the place, the shade so dense and uniform, infuse into the breast the notion of a divinity;" and thus the speculative fancy of the ancients, always ready to supply the apparent void of nature, garrisoned each grove, fountain, or grotto with some local and tutelary genius. These sylvan deities, clothed with corporeal figures and endowed with mortal appetites, were brought near to the level of humanity; but the Christian revelation, which assures us of another world, is the "evidence of things unseen," and, while it dissipates the gross and sensible creations of classic mythology, raises our conceptions to the spiritual

and the infinite. In our eager thirst for communication with the world of spirits, we naturally imagine it can only be through the medium of spirits like themselves, and, in the vulgar creed, these apparitions never come from the abodes of the blessed, but from the tomb, where they are supposed to await the period of a final and universal resurrection, and whence they are allowed to "revisit the glimpses of the moon," for penance or some other inscrutable purpose. Hence the gloomy, undefined character of the modern apparition is much more appalling than the sensual and social personifications of antiquity.

The natural phenomena of a wild, uncultivated country greatly conspire to promote the illusions of the fancy. The power of clouds to reflect, to distort, and to magnify objects is well known, and on this principle many of the preternatural appearances in the German mountains and the Scottish Highlands, whose lofty summits and unreclaimed valleys are shrouded in clouds and exhalations, have been ingeniously and philosophically explained. The solitary peasant, as the shades of evening close around him, witnesses with dismay the gathering phantoms, and, hurrying home, retails his adventures with due amplification. What is easily believed is easily seen, and the marvellous incident is soon placed beyond dispute by a multitude of testimonies. The appetite, once excited, is keen in detecting other visions and prognostics, which as speedily circulate through the channels of rustic tradition, until in time each glen and solitary heath has its unearthly visitants,

each family its omen or boding spectre, and superstition, systematized into a science, is expounded by indoctrinated wizards and gifted seers.

In addition to these fancies, common, though in a less degree, to other nations, the inhabitants of the North have inherited a more material mythology, which has survived the elegant fictions of Greece and Rome, either because it was not deemed of sufficient importance to provoke the arm of the Church or because it was too nearly accommodated to the moral constitution of the people to be thus easily eradicated. The character of a mythology is always intimately connected with that of the scenery and climate in which it is invented. Thus the graceful Nymphs and Naiads of Greece, the Peris of Persia, who live in the colors of the rainbow and on the odors of flowers, the Fairies of England, who in airy circles "dance their ringlets to the whistling wind," have the frail gossamer forms and delicate functions congenial with the beautiful countries which they inhabit; while the Elves, Bogles, Brownies, and Kelpies, which seem to have legitimately descended, in ancient Highland verse from the Scandinavian Dvergar, Nisser, etc., are of a stunted and malignant aspect, and are celebrated for nothing better than maiming cattle, bewildering the benighted traveller, and conjuring out the souls of new-born infants. Within the memory of the present generation, very well authenticated anecdotes of these ghostly kidnappers have been circulated and greedily credited in the Scottish Highlands. But the sunshine of civilization is

rapidly dispelling the lingering mists of superstition. The spirits of darkness love not the cheerful haunts of men, and the bustling activity of an increasing, industrious population allows brief space for the fears or inventions of fancy.

The fierce aspect of the Scottish ballad was mitigated under the general tranquillity which followed the accession of James to the united crowns of England and Scotland, and the Northern muse might have caught some of the inspiration which fired her Southern sister at this remarkable epoch, had not the fatal prejudices of her sovereign in favor of an English or even a Latin idiom diverted his ancient subjects from the cultivation of their own. As it was, Drummond of Hawthornden, whose melodious and melancholy strains, however, are to be enrolled among English verse, is the most eminent name which adorns the scanty annals of this reign. The civil and religious broils, which, by the sharp concussion they gave to the English intellect during the remainder of this unhappy century, seemed to have forced out every latent spark of genius, served only to discourage the less polished muse of the North. The austerity of the Reformers chilled the sweet flow of social song, and the only verse in vogue was a kind of rude satire, sometimes pointed at the licentiousness of the Roman clergy, and sometimes at the formal affectation of the Puritans, but which, from the coarseness of the execution, and the transitory interest of its topics, has for the most part been consigned to a decent oblivion.

The Revolution in 1688, and the subsequent

union * of the two kingdoms, by the permanent assurance they gave of civil and religious liberty, and, lastly, the establishment of parochial schools about the same period, by that wide diffusion of intelligence among the lower orders which has elevated them above every other European peasantry, had a most sensible influence on the moral and intellectual progress of the nation. Improvements in art and agriculture were introduced; the circle of ideas was expanded and the feelings liberalized by a free communication with their southern neighbors; and religion, resigning much of her austerity, lent a prudent sanction to the hilarity of social intercourse. Popular poetry naturally reflects the habits and prevailing sentiments of a nation. The ancient notes of the border trumpet were exchanged for the cheerful sounds of rustic revelry; and the sensibility which used to be exhausted on subjects of acute but painful interest now celebrated the temperate pleasures of domestic happiness and rational though romantic love.

The rustic glee which had put such mettle into the compositions of James the First and Fifth, those royal poets of the commonalty, as they have been aptly styled, was again renewed; ancient songs, purified from their original vices of sentiment or diction, were revived; new ones were accommodated to ancient melodies; and a revolution was gradually effected in Scottish verse, which experienced little variation during the remainder of the eighteenth century. The existence of a

* In 1707 in the reign of Queen Anne.—M.

national music is essential to the entire success of lyrical poetry. It may be said, indeed, to give wings to song, which, in spite of its imperfections, is thus borne along from one extremity of the nation to the other, with a rapidity denied to many a nobler composition.

Thus allied, verse not only represents the present, but the past; and, while it invites us to repose or to honorable action, its tones speak of joys which are gone, or wake in us the recollections of ancient glory.

It is impossible to trace the authors of a large portion of the popular lyrics of Scotland, which, like its native wild flowers, seem to have sprung up spontaneously in the most sequestered solitudes of the country. Many of these poets, even, who are familiar in the mouths of their own countrymen, are better known south of the Tweed by the compositions which, under the title of "Scottish Melodies," are diligently thrummed by every miss in her teens, than by their names; while some few others, as Ramsay, Ferguson, etc., whose independent tomes maintain higher reputation, are better known by their names than their compositions, which, much applauded, are, we suspect, but little read.

The union of Scotland with England was unpropitious to the language of the former country; at least it prevented it from attaining a classical perfection, which some, perhaps, may not regret, as being in its present state a better vehicle for the popular poetry so consonant with the genius of the nation. Under Edward the First the two na-

tions spoke the same language, and the formidable epics of Barbour and Blind Harry, his contemporaries, are cited by Warton as superior models of English versification. After the lapse of five centuries, the Scottish idiom retains a much greater affinity with the original stock than does the English; but the universal habit with the Scotch of employing the latter in works of taste or science, and of relinquishing their own idiom to the more humble uses of the people, has degraded it to the unmerited condition of a provincial dialect. Few persons care to bestow much time in deciphering a vocabulary which conceals no other treasures than those of popular fancy and tradition.

A genius like Burns certainly may do, and doubtless has done, much to diffuse a knowledge and a relish for his native idiom. His character as a poet has been too often canvassed by writers and biographers to require our panegyric. We define it, perhaps, as concisely as may be, by saying that it consisted of an acute sensibility regulated by uncommon intellectual vigor. Hence his frequent visions of rustic love and courtship never sink into mawkish sentimentality, his quiet pictures of domestic life are without insipidity, and his mirth is not the unmeaning ebullition of animal spirits, but is pointed with the reflection of a keen observer of human nature. This latter talent, less applauded in him than some others, is in our opinion his most eminent. Without the grace of La Fontaine, or the broad buffoonery of Berni, he displays the same facility of illuminating the meanest topics, seasons his humor with as shrewd

a moral, and surpasses both in a generous sensibility which gives an air of truth and cordiality to all his sentiments. Lyrical poetry admits of less variety than any other species; and Burns, from this circumstance, as well as from the flexibility of his talents, may be considered as the representative of his whole nation. Indeed, his universal genius seems to have concentrated within itself the rays which were scattered among his predecessors,—the simple tenderness of Crawford, the fidelity of Ramsay, and careless humor of Ferguson. The Doric dialect of his country was an instrument peculiarly fitted for the expression of his manly and unsophisticated sentiments. But no one is more indebted to the national music than Burns: embalmed in the sacred melody, his songs are familiar to us from childhood, and, as we read them, the silver sounds with which they have been united seem to linger in our memory, heightening and prolonging the emotions which the sentiments have excited.

Mr. Cunningham, to whom it is high time we should turn, in some prefatory reflections on the condition of Scottish poetry, laments exceedingly the improvements in agriculture and mechanics, the multiplication of pursuits, the wider expansion of knowledge, which have taken place among the peasantry of Scotland during the present century.

"Change of condition, increase of knowledge," says he, "the calling in of machinery to the aid of human labor, and the ships which whiten the ocean with their passing and repassing sails, wafting luxuries to our backs and our tables, are all matters

of delight to the historian or the politician, but of sorrow to the poet, who delights in the primitive glory of a people, and contemplates with pain all changes which lessen the original vigor of character and refine mankind till they become too sensitive for enjoyment. Man has now to labor harder and longer to shape out new ways to riches, and even bread, and feel the sorrows of the primeval curse, a hot and sweaty brow, more frequently and more severely than his ancestors. All this is uncongenial to the creation of song, where many of our finest songs have been created, and to its enjoyment, where it was long and fondly enjoyed, among the peasantry of Scotland."—*Preface.*

These circumstances certainly will be a matter of delight to the historian and politician, and we doubt if they afford any reasonable cause of lamentation to the poet. An age of rudeness and ignorance is not the most propitious to a flourishing condition of the art, which indulges quite as much in visions of the past as the present, in recollections as in existing occupations; and this is not only true of civilized, but of ruder ages: the forgotten bards of the Niebelungen and the Heldenbuch, of the romances of Arthur and of Charlemagne, looked back through the vista of seven hundred years for their subjects, and the earliest of the Border minstrelsy celebrates the antique feuds of a preceding century. On the other hand, a wider acquaintance with speculative and active concerns may be thought to open a bolder range of ideas and illustrations to the poet. Ex-

amples of this may be discerned among the Scottish poets of the present age; and if the most eminent, as Scott, Campbell, Joanna Baillie, have deserted their natural dialect and the humble themes of popular interest for others better suited to their aspiring genius, and for a language which could diffuse and perpetuate their compositions, it can hardly be matter for serious reproach even with their own countrymen. But this is not true of Scott, who has always condescended to illuminate the most rugged and the meanest topics relating to his own nation, and who has revived in his "Minstrelsy" not merely the costume but the spirit of the ancient Border muse of love and chivalry.

In a similar tone of lamentation, Mr. Cunningham deprecates the untimely decay of superstition throughout the land. But the seeds of superstition are not thus easily eradicated: its grosser illusions, indeed, may, as we have before said, be scattered by the increasing light of science; but the principal difference between a rude and a civilized age, at least as regards poetical fiction, is that the latter requires more skill and plausibility in working up the *matériel* than the former. The witches of Macbeth are drawn too broadly to impose on the modern spectator, as they probably did on the credulous age of Queen Bess; but the apparition in Job, or the Bodach Glass in Waverley, is shadowed with a dim and mysterious portraiture that inspires a solemn interest sufficient for the purposes of poetry. The philosophic mind may smile with contempt at the popular fancies, con-

vinced that the general experience of mankind contradicts the existence of apparitions; that the narratives of them are vague and ill authenticated; that they never or rarely appeal to more than one sense, and that the most open to illusion; that they appear only in moments of excitement and in seasons of solitude and obscurity; that they come for no explicable purpose and effect no perceptible result; and that, therefore, they may in every case be safely imputed to a diseased or a deluded imagination. But if, in the midst of these solemn musings, our philosopher's candle should chance to go out, it is not quite certain that he would continue to pursue them with the same stoical serenity. In short, no man is quite so much of a hero in the dark as in broad daylight, in solitude as in society, in the gloom of the churchyard as in the blaze of the drawing-room. The season and the place may be such as to oppress the stoutest heart with a mysterious awe, which, if not fear, is near akin to it. We read of adventurous travellers who through a sleepless night have defied the perilous nonentities of a haunted chamber, and the very interest we take in their exploits proves that the superstitious principle is not wholly extinguished in our own bosoms. So, indeed, do the mysterious inventions of Mrs. Radcliffe and her ghostly school; of our own Brown,* in a most especial manner; and Scott, ever anxious to exhibit the speculative as well as practical character of his countrymen, has more than once appealed to the same general principle. Doubtless few in

* See the first review in volume i. of these Miscellanies.—M.

this enlightened age are disposed boldly to admit the existence of these spiritual phenomena; but fewer still there are who have not enough of superstitious feeling lurking in their bosoms for all the purposes of poetical interest.

Mr. Cunningham's work consists of four volumes of lyrics, in a descending series from the days of Queen Mary to our own. The more ancient, after the fashion of Burns and Ramsay, he has varnished over with a coloring of diction that gives greater lustre to their faded beauties occasionally restoring a mutilated member which time and oblivion had devoured. Our author's prose, consisting of a copious preface and critical notices, is both florid and pedantic; it continually aspires to the vicious affectation of poetry, and explains the most common sentiments by a host of illustrations and images, thus perpetually reminding us of the children's play of "What is it like?" As a poet, his fame has long been established, and the few original pieces which he has introduced into the present collection have the ease and natural vivacity conspicuous in his former compositions. We will quote one or two, which we presume are the least familiar to our readers:

"A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
A wind that follows fast,
And fills the white and rustling sail,
And bends the gallant mast!
And bends the gallant mast, my boys,
While, like the eagle free,
Away the good ship flies, and leaves
Old England on the lee.

"Oh for a soft and gentle wind!
I heard a fair one cry;
But give to me the swelling breese,
And white waves heaving high;
And white waves heaving high, my lads,
The good ship tight and free;
The world of waters is our home,
And merry men are we.

"There's tempest on yon horned moon,
And lightning in yon cloud;
And hark the music, mariners!
The wind is wakening loud.
The wind is wakening loud, my boys,
The lightning flashes free;
The hollow oak our palace is,
Our heritage the sea."—Vol. iv. p. 208.

This spirited water-piece, worthy of Campbell, is one evidence among others of the tendency of the present improved condition of the Scottish peasantry to expand the beaten circle of poetical topics and illustrations. The following is as pretty a piece of fairy gossamer as has been spun out of this skeptical age:

"SONG OF THE ELFIN MILLER.

"Full merrily rings the millstone round,
Full merrily rings the wheel,
Full merrily gushes out the grist,—
Come, taste my fragrant meal.
As sends the lift its snowy drift,
So the meal comes in a shower;
Work, fairies, fast, for time flies past,—
I borrow'd the mill an hour.

"The miller he's a worldly man,
And maun hae double fee;
So draw the sluice of the churls dam,
And let the stream come free.
Shout, fairies, shout! see, gushing out,
The meal comes like a river;
The top of the grain on hill and plain
Is ours, and shall be ever.

"One elf goes chasing the wild bat's wing,
And one the white owl's horn;
One hunts the fox for the white o' his tail,
And we winna hae him till morn.
One idle fay, with the glow-worm's ray,
Runs glimmering 'mang the mosses;
Another goes tramp wi' the will-o-wisp's lamp,
To light a lad to the lasses.

"O haste, my brown elf, bring me corn
From bonnie Blackwood plains;
Go, gentle fairy, bring me grain
From green Dalgonar mains;
But, pride of a' at Closeburn ha',
Fair is the corn and fatter;
Taste, fairies, taste, a gallanter grist
Has never been wet with water.

Hilloah! my hopper is heaped high;
Hark to the well-hung wheels!
They sing for joy; the dusty roof
It clatters and it reels.
Haste, elves, and turn yon mountain burn—
Bring streams that shine like siller;
The dam is down, the moon sinks soon,
And I maun grind my meller.

"Ha! bravely done, my wanton elves!
That is a foaming stream;
See how the dust from the mill-ee flies,
And chokes the cold moonbeam.
Haste, fairies fleet, come baptized feet,
Come sack and sweep up clean,
And meet me soon, ere sinks the moon,
In thy green vale, Dalveen."—Vol. iv. p. 327.

The last we can afford is a sweet, amorous effusion, in the best style of the romantic muse of the Lowlands. It has before found a place in the "Nithsdale and Galloway" collection:

"Thou hast vow'd by thy faith, my Jeanie,
By that pretty white hand of thine,
And by all the lowing stars in heaven,
That thou wouldst aye be mine;

And I have sworn by my faith, my Jeanie,
And by that kind heart of thine,
By all the stars sown thick o'er heaven,
That thou shalt aye be mine.

"Foul fa' the hands wad loose sic bands,
And the heart wad part sic love;
But there's nae hand can loose the band
But the finger of Him above.
Though the wee wee cot maun be my bield,
And my clothing e'er sae mean,
I should lap me up rich in the faulds of love
Heaven's armfu' of my Jean.

"Thy white arm wad be a pillow to me,
Far softer than the down,
And Love wad winnow o'er us his kind, kind wings,
And sweetly we'd sleep and soun'.
Come here to me, thou lass whom I love,
Come here and kneel wi' me,
The morning is full of the presence of God,
And I cannot pray but thee.

"The wind is sweet amang the new flowers,
The wee birds sing saft on the tree,
Our goodman sits in the bonnie sunshine,
And a blithe old bodie is he;
The Beuk maun be ta'en when he comes hame,
Wi' the holie psalmodie,
And I will speak of thee when I pray,
And thou maun speak of me."—Vol. iv. p. 308.

Our readers may think we have been detained too long by so humble a theme as old songs and ballads; yet a wise man has said, "Give me the making of the ballads, and I care not who makes the laws of a nation." Indeed, they will not be lightly regarded by those who consider their influence on the character of a simple, susceptible people, particularly in a rude age, when they constitute the authentic records of national history. Thus the wandering minstrel kindles in his un-

lettered audience a generous emulation of the deeds of their ancestors, and while he sings the bloody feuds of the Zegris and Abencerrages, the Percy and the Douglas, artfully fans the flame of an expiring hostility. Under these animating influences, the ancient Spaniard and the Border warrior displayed that stern military enthusiasm which distinguished them above every other peasantry in Europe. Nor is this influence altogether extinguished in a polite age, when the narrow attachments of feudal servitude are ripened into a more expanded patriotism; the generous principle is nourished and invigorated in the patriot by the simple strains which recount the honorable toils, the homebred joys, the pastoral adventures, the romantic scenery, which have endeared to him the land of his fathers. There is no moral cause which operates more strongly in infusing a love of country into the mass of the people than the union of a national music with popular poetry.

But these productions have an additional value in the eyes of the antiquarian to what is derived from their moral or political influence, as the repertory of the motley traditions and superstitions that have descended for ages through the various races of the North. The researches of modern scholars have discovered a surprising affinity between the ancient Scottish ballad and the Teutonic, Scandinavian, and even Calmuck romance. Some of the most eminent of the old Border legends are almost literal versions of those which inflamed the martial ardor of our Danish ancestors.* A fainter

* Such are "The Childe of Elle," "Catharine and Janfarie," "Cospatric," "Willie's Lady," etc.

relationship had before been detected between them and Southern and Oriental fable. Thus, in a barbarous age, when the nearest provinces of Europe had but a distant intercourse with each other, the electric spark of fancy seems to have run around the circle of the remotest regions, animating them with the same wild and original creations.

Even the lore of the nursery may sometimes ascend to as high an antiquity. The celebrated Whittington and his Cat can display a Teutonic pedigree of more than eight centuries; "Jack, commonly called the Giant-Killer, and Thomas Thumb," says an antiquarian writer, "landed in England from the very same keels and war-ships which conveyed Hengist and Horsa, and Ebba the Saxon;" and the nursery-maid who chants the friendly monition to the "Lady-bird," or narrates the "fee-faw-fum" adventure of the carnivorous giant, little thinks she has purloined the stores of Teutonic song and Scandinavian mythology.* The ingenious Blanco White, who, under the name of Doblado, has thrown great light on the character and condition of modern Spain, has devoted a chapter to tracing out the genealogies of the games and popular pastimes of his country.

* "Lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home,
Your house is on fire, your children will roam."

This fragment of a respectable little poem has soothed the slumbers of the German infant for many ages. The giant who so cunningly scented the "blood of an Englishman" is the counterpart of the personage recorded in the collection of Icelandic mythology made by Snorro in the thirteenth century. Edda, Fable 23.

Something of the same kind might be attempted in the untrodden walks of nursery literature. Ignorance and youth are satisfied at no great cost of invention. The legend of one generation answers, with little variation, for the next, and, within the precincts of the nursery, obtains that imperishable existence which has been the vain boast of many a loftier lyric. That the mythology of one age should be abandoned to the "Juvenile Cabinet" of another, is indeed curious. Thus the doctrines most venerated by man in the infancy of society become the sport of infants in an age of civilization, furnishing a pleasing example of the progress of the human intellect, and a plausible coloring for the dream of perfectibility.

DA PONTE'S OBSERVATIONS.*

(July, 1825.)

THE larger part of the above work is devoted to strictures upon an article on "Italian Narrative Poetry," which appeared in October, 1824. The author is an eminent Italian teacher at New York. His poetical abilities have been highly applauded in his own country, and were rewarded with the office of Cæsarean poet at the court of Vienna, where he acquired new laurels as successor to the celebrated Metastasio. His various fortunes in literary and fashionable life while in Europe, and the eccentricities of his enthusiastic character, furnish many interesting incidents for an autobiography published by him two years since at New York, and to this we refer those of our readers who are desirous of a more intimate acquaintance with the author.

We regret that our remarks, which appeared to us abundantly encomiastic of Italian letters, and which certainly proceeded from our admiration for them, should have given such deep offence to the respectable author of the *Osservazioni* as to compel him, although a "veteran" in literature, to arm himself against us in defence of his "calumniated" country. According to him, "we

* "Alcune Osservazioni sull' Articulo Quarto publicato nel North American Review, il Mese d'Ottobre dell' Anno 1824. Da L. Da Ponte. Nuova-Jorca. Stampatori Gray e Bunce." 1825.

judge too lightly of the Italians, and quote as axioms the absurd opinions of their insane rivals (*accaniti rivali*) the French. We conceal some things where silence has the appearance of malice; we expose others which common generosity should have induced us to conceal; we are guilty of false and arbitrary accusations, that do a grievous wrong to the most tender and most compassionate of nations; we are wanting in a decent reverence for the illustrious men of his nation; finally, we pry with the eyes of Argus into the defects of Italian literature, and with one eye only, and that, indeed, half shut (*anche quello socchiuso*), into its particular merits." It is true, this sour rebuke is sweetened once or twice with a compliment to the extent of our knowledge, and a "confession that many of our reasonings, facts, and reflections merit the gratitude of his countrymen; that our intentions were doubtless generous, praiseworthy," and the like; but such vague commendations, besides that they are directly inconsistent with some of the imputations formerly alleged against us, are too thinly scattered over sixty pages of criticism to mitigate very materially the severity of the censure. The opinions of the author of the *Osservazioni* on this subject are undoubtedly entitled to great respect; but it may be questioned whether the excitable temperament usual with his nation, and the local partiality which is common to the individuals of every nation, may not have led him sometimes into extravagance and error. This seems to us to have been the case; and, as he has more than once intimated the extreme difficulty

of forming a correct estimate of a foreign literature, "especially of the Italian," we shall rely exclusively for the support of our opinions on the authorities of his own countrymen, claiming one exception only in favor of the industrious Ginguené, whose opinions he has himself recommended to "the diligent study of all who would form a correct notion of Italian literature." *

His first objection is against what he considers the unfair view which we exhibited of the influence of Italy on English letters. This influence, we had stated, was most perceptible under the reign of Elizabeth, but had gradually declined during the succeeding century, and, with a few exceptions, among whom we cited Milton and Gray, could not be said to be fairly discerned until the commencement of the present age. Our censor is of a different opinion. "Instead of confining *himself*" (he designates us always by this humble pronoun) "to Milton," he says, "for which exception *I acknowledge no obligation to him,* since few there are who were not previously acquainted with it, I would have had him acknowledge that many English writers not only loved and admired, but studiously imitated, our authors, from the time of Chaucer to that of the great Byron; for the *clearest evidence* of which it will suffice to read the compositions of this last poet, of Milton, and of Gray." He then censures us for not specifying the obligations which Shakspeare was under to the

* "Ma bisognava aver l'anima di Ginguené, conoscer la lingua e la letteratura Italiana come Ginguené, e amar il vero come Ginguené, per sentire," etc. Osservazioni, pp. 115, 116.

early Italian novelists for the plots of many of his pieces ; " which silence " he deems " as little to be commended as would be an attempt to conceal the light, the most beautiful prerogative of the sun, from one who had never before seen it. And," he continues, " these facts should, for two reasons, have been especially communicated to Americans: first, to animate them more and more to study the Italian tongue; and, secondly, in order not to imitate, by what may appear a malicious silence the example of another nation [the French], who, after drawing their intellectual nourishment from us, have tried every method of destroying the reputation of their earliest masters."—Pp. 74–79.

We have extracted the leading ideas diffused by the author of the *Osservazioni* over half a dozen pages. Some of them have at least the merit of novelty. Such are not, however, those relating to Chaucer, whom we believe no one ever doubted to have found in the Tuscan tongue—the only one of that rude age in which

" The pure well-head of poesie did dwell "—

one principal source of his premature inspiration. We acknowledged that the same sources nourished the genius of Queen Elizabeth's writers, among whom we particularly cited the names of Surrey, Sidney, and Spenser. And if we did not distinguish Shakspeare amid the circle of contemporary dramatists whom we confessed to have derived the designs of many of their most popular plays from Italian models, it was because we did

not think the extent of his obligations, amounting to half a dozen imperfect skeletons of plots, required any such specification; more especially as several of his *great minor* contemporaries, as Fletcher, Shirley, and others, made an equally liberal use of the same materials. The obligations of Shakspeare, such as they were, are, moreover, notorious to every one. The author of the *Osservazioni* expressly disclaims any feelings of gratitude towards us for mentioning those of Milton, because they were notorious. It is really very hard to please him. The literary enterprise which had been awakened under the reign of Elizabeth was in no degree diminished under her successor; but the intercourse with Italy, so favorable to it at an earlier period, was, for obvious reasons, at an end. A Protestant people, but lately separated from the Church of Rome, would not deign to resort to what they believed her corrupt fountains for the sources of instruction. The austerity of the Puritan was yet more scandalized by the voluptuous beauties of her lighter compositions, and Milton, whose name we cited in our article, seems to have been a solitary exception on the records of that day, of an eminent English scholar thoroughly imbued with a relish for Italian letters.

After the days of civil and religious faction had gone by, a new aspect was given to things under the brilliant auspices of the Restoration. The French language was at that time in the meridian of its glory. Boileau, with an acute but pedantic taste, had draughted his critical ordinances from the most perfect models of classical

antiquity. Racine, working on these principles, may be said to have put into action the poetic conceptions of his friend Boileau; and, with such a model to illustrate the excellence of his theory, it is not wonderful that the code of the French legislator, recommended as it was, too, by the patronage of the most imposing court in Europe, should have found its way into the rival kingdom and have superseded there every other foreign influence.* It did so. "French criticism," says Bishop Hurd, speaking of this period, "has carried it before the Italian with the rest of Europe. This dexterous people have found means to lead the taste, as well as set the fashions, of their neighbors." Again: "The exact but cold Boileau happened to say something of the *clinquant* of Tasso, and the magic of this word, like the report of Astolfo's horn in Ariosto, overturned at once the solid and well-built foundation of Italian poetry: it became a sort of watch-word among the critics." Mr. Gifford, whose acquaintance with the ancient literature of his nation entitles him to perfect confidence on this subject, whatever we may be disposed to concede to him on some others, in his introduction to Massinger remarks, in relation to this period, that "criticism, which in a former reign had been making no inconsiderable

* Boileau's sagacity in fully appreciating the merits of Phèdre and of Athalie, and his independence in supporting them against the fashionable factions of the day, are well known. But he conferred a still greater obligation on his friend. Racine the younger tells us that "his father, in his youth, was given to a vicious taste (*concetti*), and that Boileau led him back to nature, and taught him to rhyme with labor (*rimer difficilement*)."

progress under the great masters of Italy, was now diverted into a new channel, and only studied under the puny and jejune canons of their degenerate followers, the French." Pope and Addison, the legislators of their own and a future age, cannot be exempted from this reproach. The latter conceived and published the most contemptuous opinion of the Italians. In a very early paper of the Spectator bearing his own signature (No. 6), he observes, "The finest writers among the modern Italians [in contradistinction to the ancient Romans] express themselves in such a florid form of words, and such tedious circumlocutions, as are used by none but pedants in our own country, and at the same time fill their writings with such poor imaginations and conceits as our youths are ashamed of before they have been two years at the university." In the same paper he adds, "I entirely agree with Monsieur Boileau, that one verse of Virgil is worth all the tinsel of Tasso." This is very unequivocal language, and our censor will do us the justice to believe that we do not quote it from any "malicious intention," but simply to show what must have been the popular taste, when sentiments like these were promulgated by a leading critic of the day, in the most important and widely-circulated journal in the kingdom.*

* Addison tells us, in an early number of the Spectator, that three thousand copies were daily distributed; and Chalmers somewhere remarks that this circulation was afterwards increased to fourteen thousand; an amount, in proportion to the numerical population and intellectual culture of that day, very far superior to that of the most popular journals at the present time.

In conformity with this anti-Italian spirit, we find that no translation of Ariosto was attempted subsequent to the very imperfect one by Harrington in Elizabeth's time. In the reign of George the Second a new version was published by one Huggins. In his preface he observes, "After this work was pretty far advanced, I was informed there had been a translation published in the reign of Elizabeth, and dedicated to that queen; whereupon I requested a friend to obtain a sight of that book; for it is, it seems, very scarce, and the *glorious original* much more so, in this country." Huggins was a learned scholar, although he made a bad translation. Yet it seems he had never met with, or even heard of, the version of his predecessor Harrington. But, without encumbering ourselves with authorities, a glance at the compositions of the period in question would show how feeble are the pretensions of an Italian influence, and we are curious to know what important names, or productions, or characteristics can be cited by the author of the *Osservazioni* in support of it. Dryden, whom he has objected to us, versified, it is true, three of his Fables from Boccaccio; but this brief effort is the only evidence we can recall, in the multitude of his miscellaneous writings, of a respect for Italian letters, and he is well known to have powerfully contributed to the introduction of a French taste in the drama. The only exception which occurs to our general remark is that afforded by the Metaphysical School of Poets, whose vicious propensities have been referred by Dr. Johnson to Marini and his followers. But as

an ancient English model for this affectation may be found in Donne, and as the doctor was not prodigal of golden opinions towards Italy, we will not urge upon our opponent what may be deemed an ungenerous, perhaps an unjust, imputation. The same indifference appears to have lasted the greater portion of the eighteenth century, and with few exceptions, enumerated in our former article, the Tuscan spring seems to have been almost hermetically sealed against the English scholar. The increasing thirst for every variety of intellectual nourishment in our age has again invited to these early sources, and, while every modern tongue has been anxiously explored by the diligence of critics, the Italian has had the good fortune to be more widely and more successfully cultivated than at any former period.

We should apologize to our readers for afflicting them with so much commonplace detail, but we know no other way of rebutting the charge, which, according to the author of the *Osservazioni*, might be imputed to us, of a "malicious silence" in our account of the influence of Italian letters in England.

But if we have offended by saying too little on the preceding head, we have given equal offence on another occasion by saying too much. Our antagonist attacks us from such opposite quarters that we hardly know where to expect him. We had spoken, and in terms of censure, of Boileau's celebrated sarcasm upon Tasso; and we had added that, notwithstanding an affected change of opinion, "he adhered until the time of his death

to his original heresy." "As much," says our censor, "as it would have been desirable in him [the reviewer] to have spoken on these other matters, so it would have been equally proper to have suppressed all that Boileau wrote upon Tasso, together with the remarks made by him in the latter part of his life, as having a tendency to prejudice unfavorably the minds of such as had not before heard them. Nor should he have coldly styled it his 'original heresy;' but he should have said that, in spite of all the heresies of Boileau and all the blunders of Voltaire, the *Jerusalem* has been regarded for more than two centuries and a half, and will be regarded, as long as the earth has motion, by *all* the nations of the civilized world, as the most noble, most magnificent, most sublime epic produced for more than eighteen centuries; that this consent and this duration of its splendor are the strongest and most authentic seal of its incontrovertible merit; that this unlucky *clinquant*, that defaces at most a hundred verses of this poem, and which, in fact, is nothing but an excess of overwrought beauty, is but the merest flaw in a mountain of diamonds; that these hundred verses are compensated by more than three thousand in which are displayed all the perfection, grace, learning, eloquence, and coloring of the loftiest poetry." In the same swell of commendation the author proceeds for half a page farther. We know not what inadvertence on our part can have made it necessary, by way of reproof to us, to pour upon Tasso's head such a pelting of pitiless panegyric. Among all the Italian poets there is

no one for whom we have ever felt so sincere a veneration, after

> "quel signor dell' altissimo canto
> Che sovra gli altri, com' aquila vola,"

as for Tasso. In some respects he is even superior to Dante. His writings are illustrated by a purer morality, as his heart was penetrated with a more genuine spirit of Christianity. Oppression, under which they both suffered the greater part of their lives, wrought a very different effect upon the gentle character of Tasso and the vindictive passions of the Ghibelline. The religious wars of Jerusalem, exhibiting the triumphs of the Christian chivalry, were a subject peculiarly adapted to the character of the poet, who united the qualities of an accomplished knight with the most unaffected piety. The vulgar distich, popular in his day with the common people of Ferrara, is a homely but unsuspicious testimony to his opposite virtues.* His greatest fault was an ill-regulated sensibility, and his greatest misfortune was to have

* "Colla penna e colla spada,
Nessun val quanto Torquato."

This elegant couplet was made in consequence of a victory obtained by Tasso over three cavaliers who treacherously attacked him in one of the public squares of Ferrara. His skill in fencing is notorious, and his passion for it is also betrayed by the frequent circumstantial, and masterly pictures of it in his "Jerusalem." See, in particular, the mortal combat between Tancred and Argante, canto xix., where all the evolutions of the art are depicted with the accuracy of a professed sword-player. In the same manner, the numerous and animated allusions to field-sports betray the favorite pastime of the author of Waverley; and the falcon, the perpetual subject of illustration and simile in the "Divina Commedia," might lead us to suspect a similar predilection in Dante.

been thrown among people who knew not how to compassionate the infirmities of genius. In contemplating such a character, one may without affectation feel a disposition to draw a veil over the few imperfections that tarnished it, and in our notice of it, expanded into a dozen pages, there are certainly not the same number of lines devoted to his defects, and those exclusively of a literary nature. This is but a moderate allowance for the transgressions of any man; yet, according to Mr. Da Ponte, "we close our eyes against the merits of his countrymen, and pry with those of Argus into their defects."

But why are we to be debarred the freedom of criticism enjoyed even by the Italians themselves? To read the *Osservazioni,* one would conclude that Tasso, from his first appearance, had united all suffrages in his favor; that, by unanimous acclamation, his poem had been placed at the head of all the epics of the last eighteen centuries, and that the only voice raised against him had sprung from the petty rivalries of French criticism, from which source we are more than once complimented with having recruited our own forces. Does our author reckon for nothing the reception with which the first academy in Italy greeted the Jerusalem on its introduction into the world, when they would have smothered it with the kindness of their criticism? Or the volumes of caustic commentary by the celebrated Galileo, almost every line of which is a satire? Or, to descend to a later period, when the lapse of more than a century may be supposed to have rectified the caprice of contemporary

judgments, may we not shelter ourselves under the authorities of Andrés,* whose favorable notice of Italian letters our author cites with deference; of Metastasio, the avowed admirer and eulogist of Tasso;† of Gravina, whose philosophical treatise on the principles of poetry, a work of great authority in his own country, exhibits the most ungrateful irony on the literary pretensions of Tasso, almost refusing to him the title of a poet?‡

But to proceed no farther, we may abide by the solid judgment of Ginguené, that second Daniel, whose opinions we are advised so strenuously "to study and to meditate." "As to florid images, frivolous thoughts, affected turns, conceits, and *jeux de mots*, they are to be found in greater abundance in Tasso's poem than is commonly imagined. The enumeration of them would be long, if one should run over the Jerusalem and cite all that could be classed under one or other of these heads, etc. Let us content ourselves with a few examples." He then devotes ten pages to these few examples (our author is indignant that we should have bestowed as many lines), and closes with this sensible reflection; "I have not promised a blind faith in the writers I admire the most; I have not promised it to Boileau, I have not promised it to Tasso; and in literature we all owe our faith and homage to the eternal laws of truth, of nature, and of taste." §

But in order to relieve Tasso from an undue responsibility, we had stated in our controverted

* Dell' Origine, etc., d'ogni Letteratura, tom. iv. p. 250.
† Opere postume di Metastasio, tom. iii. p. 30.
‡ Ragion poetica, pp. 161, 162.
§ Histoire littéraire, tom. v. pp. 368, 378.

article that "the affectations imputed to him were to be traced to a much more remote origin;" that "Petrarch's best productions were stained with them, as were those of preceding poets, and that they seemed to have flowed directly from the Provençal, the fountain of Italian lyric poetry." This transfer of the sins of one poet to the door of another is not a whit more to the approbation of our censor, and he not only flatly denies the truth of our remark, as applied to "Petrarch's best productions," but gravely pronounces it "one of the most solemn, the most horrible literary blasphemies that ever proceeded from the tongue or pen of mortal!" * "I maintain," says he, "that not one of those that are truly Petrarch's best productions, and there are very many, can be accused of such a defect; let but the critic point me out a single affected or vicious expression in the three patriotic Canzoni, or in the *Chiare fresche e dolci acque,* or in the *Tre Sorelle,*" etc. (he names several others), "or, in truth, in any of the rest, excepting one or two only." He then recommends to us that, "instead of hunting out the errors and blemishes of these masters of our intellects, and occupying ourselves with unjust and unprofitable criticism, we should throw over them the mantle of gratitude, and recompense them with our eulogiums and applause." In conformity with which, the author proceeds to pour out his grateful tribute on the head of the ancient laureate for two pages farther,

* "Dirò essere questa una delle più solenni, delle più orribili letterarie bestemmie, che sia stata mai pronunziata o scritta da lingua o penna mortale."—P. 94.

but which, as not material to the argument, we must omit.

We know no better way of answering all this than by taking up the gauntlet thrown down to us, and we are obliged to him for giving us the means of bringing the matter to so speedy an issue. We will take one of the first Canzoni, of which he has challenged our scrutiny. It is in Petrarch's best manner, and forms the first of a series which has received, κατ' ἐξοχήν, the title of the *Three Sisters* (*Tre Sorelle*). It is indited to his mistress's eyes, and the first stanza contains a beautiful invocation to these sources of a lover's inspiration; but in the second we find him relapsing into the genuine Provençal heresy:

"When I become *snow* before their *burning rays*,
Your noble pride
Is perhaps offended with my unworthiness.
Oh, if this my apprehension
Should not *temper the flame that consumes me*,
Happy should I be *to dissolve;* since in their presence
It is dearer to me to die than to live without them.
Then, that I do *not melt*,
Being so frail an object, before so *potent a fire*,
It is not my own strength which saves me from it,
But principally fear,
Which *congeals* the blood wandering through my veins,
And mends the heart that it may *burn* a long time." *

This melancholy parade of cold conceits, of fire and snow, thawing and freezing, is extracted, be

* "Quando agli ardenti rai neve divegno,
Vostro gentile sdegno
Forse ch' allor mia indegnitate offende.
O, se questa temenza
Non temprasse l' arsura che m' incende,
Beato venir men! che n' lor presenza

it observed, from one of those choice productions which is recommended as without a blemish; indeed, not only is it one of the best, but it was esteemed by Petrarch himself, together with its two sister odes, the very best of his lyrical pieces, and the decision of the poet has been ratified by posterity. Let it not be objected that the spirit of an ode must necessarily evaporate in a prose translation. The ideas may be faithfully transcribed, and we would submit it to the most ordinary taste whether ideas like those above quoted can ever be ennobled by any artifice of expression.

We think the preceding extract from one of the "best of Petrarch's compositions" may sufficiently vindicate us from the imputation of unprecedented "blasphemy" on his poetical character; but, lest an appeal be again made, on the ground of a diversity in national taste, we will endeavor to fortify our feeble judgment with one or two authorities among his own countrymen, whom Mr. Da Ponte may be more inclined to admit.

The Italians have exceeded every other people in the grateful tribute of commentaries which they have paid to the writings of their eminent men: some of these are of extraordinary value, especially in verbal criticism, while many more, by the

M' è più caro il morir, che l' viver senza.
Dunque ch' i' non mi sfaccia,
Si frale oggetto a si possente foco,
Non è proprio valor, che me ne scampi;
Ma la paura un poco,
Che 'l sangue vago per le vene agghiaccia,
Risalda 'l cor, perchè più tempo avvampi."
Canzone vii., nell' Edizione di Muratori.

contrary lights which they shed over the path of the scholar, serve rather to perplex than to enlighten it.* Tassoni and Muratori are accounted among the best of Petrarch's numerous commentators, and the latter, in particular, has discriminated his poetical character with as much independence as feeling. We cannot refrain from quoting a few lines from Muratori's preface, as exceedingly pertinent to our present purpose: "Who, I beg to ask, is so pedantic, so blind an admirer of Petrarch, that he will pretend that no defects are to be found in his verses, or, *being found, will desire they should be respected with a religious silence?* Whatever may be our rule in regard to moral defects, there can be no doubt that in those of art and science the public interest requires that truth should be openly unveiled, since it is important that all should distinguish the beautiful from the bad, in order to imitate the one and to avoid the other." † In the same tone speaks Tiraboschi (tom. v. p. 474). Yet more to the purpose is an observation of the Abbé Denina upon Petrarch, "who," says he, "not only in his more ordinary

* A single ode has furnished a repast for a volume. The number of Petrarch's commentators is incredible: no less than a dozen of the most eminent Italian scholars have been occupied with annotations upon him at the same time. Dante has been equally fortunate. A noble Florentine projected an edition of a hundred volumes for the hundred cantos of the "Commedia," which should embrace the different illustrations. One of the latest of the fraternity, Biagioli, in an edition of Dante, published at Paris, 1818, not only claims for his master a foreknowledge of the existence of America, but of the celebrated Harveian discovery of the circulation of the blood! (Tom. i. p. 18, note.) After this, one may feel less surprise at the bulk of these commentaries.

† Le Rime di F. Petrarca; con le Osservazioni di Tassoni, Muzio, e Muratori. Pref., p. 9.

sonnets affords obvious examples of affectation and coldness, but in his *most tender and most beautiful* compositions approaches the conceited and inflated style of which I am now speaking." * And the "impartial Ginguené," a name we love to quote, confesses that "Petrarch could not deny himself those puerile antitheses of cold and heat, of ice and flames, which occasionally *disfigure his most interesting and most agreeable pieces.*" † It would be easy to marshal many other authorities of equal weight in our defence, but obviously superfluous, since those we have adduced are quite competent to our vindication from the reproach, somewhat severe, of having uttered "the most horrible blasphemy which ever proceeded from the pen of mortal."

The age of Petrarch, like that of Shakspeare, must be accountable for his defects, and in this manner we may justify the character of the poet where we cannot that of his compositions. The Provençal, the most polished European dialect of the Middle Ages, had reached its last perfection before the fourteenth century. Its poetry, chiefly amatory and lyrical, may be considered as the homage offered by the high-bred cavaliers of that day at the shrine of beauty, and, of whatever value for its literary execution, is interesting for the beautiful grace it diffuses over the iron age of chivalry. It was, as we have said, principally devoted to love; those who did not feel could at least affect the tender passion; and hence the influx of subtle meta-

* Vicende della Letteratura, tom. ii. p. 55.

† Histoire littéraire, tom. ii. p. 566.

phors and frigid conceits that give a meretricious brilliancy to most of the Provençal poetry. The fathers of Italian verse, Guido, Cino, etc., seduced by the fashion of the period, clothed their own more natural sentiments in the same vicious forms of expression; even Dante, in his admiration, often avowed, for the Troubadours, could not be wholly insensible to their influence; but the less austere Petrarch, both from constitutional temperament and the accidental circumstances of his situation, was more deeply affected by them. In the first place, a pertinacious attachment to a mistress whose heart was never warmed, although her vanity may have been gratified by the adulation of the finest poet of the age, seems to have maintained an inexplicable control over his affections, or his fancy, during the greater portion of his life. In the amatory poetry of the ancients, polluted with coarse and licentious images, he could find no model for the expression of this sublimated passion. But the Platonic theory of love had been imported into Italy by the fathers of the Church, and Petrarch, better schooled in ancient learning than any of his contemporaries, became early enamored of the speculative doctrines of the Greek philosophy. To this source he was indebted for those abstractions and visionary ecstasies which sometimes give a generous elevation, but very often throw a cloud over his conceptions. And, again, an intimate familiarity with the Provençal poetry was the natural consequence of his residence in the south of France. There, too, he must often have been a spectator

at those metaphysical disputations in the courts of love, which exhibited the same ambition of metaphor, studied antithesis, and hyperbole, as the written compositions of Provence. To all these causes may be referred those defects which, under favor be it spoken, occasionally offend us, even "in his most perfect compositions." The rich finish which Petrarch gave to the Tuscan idiom has perpetuated these defects in the poetry of his country. *Decipit exemplar vitiis imitabile.* His beauties were inimitable, but to copy his errors was in some measure to tread in his footsteps, and a servile race of followers sprang up in Italy, who, under the emphatic name of Petrarchists, have been the object of derision or applause, as a good or a bad taste predominated in their country. Warton, with apparent justice, refers to the same source some of the early corruptions in English poetry; and Petrarch—we hope it is not "blasphemy" to say it—becomes, by the predominance of his genius, eminently responsible for the impurities of diction which disfigure some of the best productions both in English literature and his own.

We trust that the free manner in which we have spoken will not be set down by the author of the *Osservazioni* to a malicious desire of "calumniating" the literature of his country. We have been necessarily led to it in vindication of our former assertions. After an interval of nearly five centuries, the dispassionate voice of posterity has awarded to Petrarch the exact measure of censure and applause. We have but repeated their judgment. No one of the illustrious triumvirate

of the fourteenth century can pretend to have possessed so great an influence over his own age and over posterity. Dante, sacrificed by a faction, was, as he pathetically complains, a wandering mendicant in a land of strangers; Boccaccio, with the interval of a few years in the meridian of his life, passed from the gayety of a court to the seclusion of a cloister; but Petrarch, the friend, the minister of princes, devoted, during the whole of his long career, his wealth, his wide authority, and his talents to the generous cause of philosophy and letters. He was unwearied in his researches after ancient manuscripts, and from the most remote corners of Italy, from the obscure recesses of churches and monasteries, he painfully collected the mouldering treasures of antiquity. Many of them he copied with his own hand,—among the rest, all the works of Cicero; and his beautiful transcript of the epistles of the Roman orator is still preserved in the Laurentian Library at Florence. In his numerous Latin compositions he aspired to revive the purity and elegance of the Augustan age; and, if he did not altogether succeed in the attempt, he may claim the merit of having opened the soil for the more successful cultivation of later Italian scholars.

His own efforts, and the generous impulse which his example communicated to his age, have justly entitled him to be considered the restorer of classical learning. His greatest glory, however, is derived from the spirit of life which he breathed into modern letters. Dante had fortified the Tuscan idiom with the vigor and severe simplicity

of an ancient language, but the graceful genius of Petrarch was wanting to ripen it into that harmony of numbers which has made it the most musical of modern dialects. His knowledge of the Provençal enabled him to enrich his native tongue with many foreign beauties; his exquisite ear disposed him to refuse all but the most melodious combinations; and, at the distance of five hundred years, not a word in him has become obsolete, not a phrase too quaint to be used. Voltaire has passed the same high eulogium upon Pascal; but Pascal lived three centuries later than Petrarch. It would be difficult to point out the writer who so far fixed the ἔπεα πτερόεντα; we certainly could not assign an earlier period than the commencement of the last century. Petrarch's brilliant success in the Italian led to most important consequences all over Europe by the evidence which it afforded of the capacities of a modern tongue. He relied, however, for his future fame on his elaborate Latin compositions, and, while he dedicated these to men of the highest rank, he gave away his Italian lyrics to ballad-mongers, to be chanted about the streets for their own profit. His contemporaries authorized this judgment, and it was for his Latin eclogues, and his epic on Scipio Africanus, that he received the laurel wreath of poetry in the Capitol. But nature must eventually prevail over the decisions of pedantry or fashion. By one of those fluctuations not very uncommon in the history of letters, the author of the Latin "*Africa*" is now known only as the lover of Laura and the father of Italian song.

We have been led into this long, we fear tedious, exposition of the character of Petrarch, partly from the desire of defending the justice of our former criticism against the heavy imputations of the author of the *Osservazioni*, and partly from reluctance to dwell only on the dark side of a picture so brilliant as that of the laureate, who, in a barbarous age, with

> "his rhetorike so swete
> Enluminid all Itaile of poetrie."

Our limits will compel us to pass lightly over some less important strictures of our author.

About the middle of the last century a bitter controversy arose between Tiraboschi and Lampillas, a learned but intemperate Spaniard, respecting which of their two nations had the best claim to the reproach of having corrupted the other's literature in the sixteenth century. In alluding to it, we had remarked that "the Italian had the better of his adversary in temper, if not in argument." The author of the *Osservazioni* styles this "a dry and dogmatic decision, which so much displeased a certain Italian letterato that he had promised him a confutation of it." We know not who the indignant letterato may be whose thunder has been so long hanging over us, but we must say that, so far from a "dogmatic decision," if ever we made a circumspect remark in our lives, this was one. As far as it went, it was complimentary to the Italians; for the rest, we waived all discussion of the merits of the controversy, both because it was impertinent to our subject, and because we were

not sufficiently instructed in the details to go into it. One or two reflections, however, we may now add. The relative position of Italy and Spain, political and literary, makes it highly probable that the predominant influence, of whatever kind it may have been, proceeded from Italy. 1. She had matured her literature to a high perfection while that of every other nation was in its infancy, and she was, of course, much more likely to communicate than to receive impressions. 2. Her political relations with Spain were such as particularly to increase this probability in reference to her. The occupation of an insignificant corner of her own territory (for Naples was very insignificant in every literary aspect) by the house of Aragon opened an obvious channel for the transmission of her opinions into the sister kingdom. 3. Any one, even an Italian, at all instructed in the Spanish literature, will admit that this actually did happen in the reign of Charles the Fifth, the golden age of Italy; that not only, indeed, the latter country influenced but changed the whole complexion of Spanish letters, establishing, through the intervention of her high-priests, Boscan and Garcilaso, what is universally recognized under the name of an Italian school. This was an era of good taste; but when, only fifty years later, both languages were overrun with those deplorable affectations which, in Italy particularly, have made the very name of the century (*seicento*) a term of reproach, it would seem probable that the same country which so short a time before had possessed so direct an influence over

the other should through the same channels have diffused the poison with which its own literature was infected. As Marini and Gongora, however, the reputed founders of the school, were contemporaries, it is extremely difficult to adjust the precise claims of either to the melancholy credit of originality; and, after all, the question to foreigners can be one of little interest or importance.

Much curiosity has existed respecting the source of those affectations which, at different periods, have tainted the modern languages of Europe. Each nation is ambitious of tracing them to a foreign origin, and *all* have at some period or other agreed to find this in Italy. From this quarter the French critics derive their *style précieux*, which disappeared before the satire of Molière and Boileau; from this the English derive their *metaphysical* school of Cowley; and the *cultismo*, of which we have been speaking, which Lope and Quevedo condemned by precept but authorized by example, is referred by the Spaniards to the same source. The early celebrity of Petrarch and his vicious imitators may afford a specious justification of all this; but a generous criticism may perhaps be excused in referring them to a more ancient origin. The Provençal for three centuries was the most popular and, as we have before said, the most polished dialect in Europe. The language of the people all along the fertile coasts of the Mediterranean, it was also the language of poetry in most of the polite courts of Europe, —in those of Toulouse, Provence, Sicily, and of several in Italy; it reached its highest perfection

under the Spanish nobles of Aragon; it passed into England in the twelfth century with the dowry of Eleanor of Guienne and Poictou; even kings did not disdain to cultivate it, and the lion-hearted Richard, if report be true, could embellish the rude virtues of chivalry with the milder glories of a Troubadour.* When this precocious dialect had become extinct, its influence still remained. The early Italian poets gave a sort of classical sanction to its defects; but, while their genius may thus with justice be accused of scattering the seeds of corruption, the soil must be confessed to have been universally prepared for their reception at a more remote period.

Thus the metaphysical conceits of Cowley's school, which Dr. Johnson has referred to Marini, may be traced through the poetry of Donne, of Shakspeare and his contemporaries, of Surrey, Wyatt, and Chaucer, up to the fugitive pieces of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which have been redeemed from oblivion by the diligence of the antiquarian. In the same manner, the religious and amatory poetry of Spain at the close of the thirteenth century, as exhibited in their *Cancioneros,* displays the same subtleties and barbaric

* Every one is acquainted with Sismondi's elegant treatise on the Provençal poetry. It cannot, however, now be relied on as of the highest authority. The subject has been much more fully explored, since the publication of his work, by Monsieur Raynouard, Secretary of the French Academy. His Poésies des Troubadours has now reached the sixth volume; and W. A. Schlegel, in a treatise of little bulk but great learning, entitled Observations sur la Langue et la Littérature Provençale, has pronounced it, by the facts it has brought to light, to have given the *coup de grâce* to the theory of Father Andrés, whom Sismondi has chiefly followed.

taste for ornament, from which few of her writers, even in the riper season of her literature, have been wholly uncontaminated. Perhaps the perversities of Voiture and of Scudéry may find as remote a genealogy in France. The corruptions of the Pleiades may afford one link in the chain, and any one who has leisure might verify our suggestions. Almost every modern literature seems to have contained in its earliest germs an active principle of corruption. The perpetual lapses into barbarism have at times triumphed over all efforts of sober criticism; and the perversion of intellect for the greater part of a century may furnish to the scholar an ample field for humiliating reflection. How many fine geniuses in the condemned age of the *seicentisti,* wandering after the false lights of Marini and his school, substituted cold conceits for wit, puns for thoughts, and wire-drawn metaphors for simplicity and nature! How many, with Cowley, exhausted a genuine wit in hunting out remote analogies and barren combinations, or, with Lope, and even Calderon, devoted pages to curious distortions of rhyme, to echoes or acrostics, in scenes which invited all the eloquence of poetry! Prostitutions of genius like these not merely dwarf the human mind, but carry it back centuries to the scholastic subtleties, the alliterations, anagrams, and thousand puerile devices of the Middle Ages.

But we have already rambled too far from the author of the *Osservazioni.* Our next rock of offence is a certain inconsiderate astonishment which we expressed at the patience of his country-

men under the infliction of epics of thirty and forty cantos in length; and he reminds us of our corresponding taste, equally unaccountable, for novels and romances spun out into an interminable length, like those, for example, by the author of Waverley [p. 82 to 85]. A liberal criticism, we are aware, will be diffident of censuring the discrepancies of national tastes. Where the value of the thought is equal, the luxury of polished verse and poetic imagery may yield a great superiority to poetry over prose, particularly with a people so sensible to melody and of so vivacious a fancy as the Italians; but, then, to accomplish all this requires a higher degree of skill in the artist, and mediocrity in poetry is intolerable.

"Mediocribus esse poetis
Non homines, non Di," etc.

Horace's maxim is not the less true for being somewhat stale. D'Alembert has uttered a sweeping denunciation against all long works in verse, as impossible to be read through without experiencing *ennui;* from which he does not except even the masterpieces of antiquity.* What would he have said to a second-rate Italian epic, wiredrawn into thirty or forty cantos, of the *incredibilia* of chivalry!

The English novel, if tolerably well executed, may convey some solid instruction in its details of life, of human character, and of passion; but the tales of chivalry—the overcharged pictures of an imaginary state of society, of "Gorgons,

* Œuvres philosophiques, etc., tom. iv. p. 152.

hydras, and chimeras dire"—can be regarded only as an intellectual *relaxation.* In a less polished dialect, and in a simpler age, they beguiled the tedious evenings of our unlettered Norman ancestors, and as late as Elizabeth's day they incurred their parting malediction from the worthy Ascham, as "stuff for wise men to laugh at, whose whole pleasure standeth in open manslaughter and bold bawdry." The remarks in our article, of course, had no reference to the *chefs-d'œuvre* of their romantic muse, many of which we had been diligently commending. It is the prerogative of genius, we all know, to consecrate whatever it touches.

Some other of our general remarks seem to have been barbed arrows to the patriot breast of the author of the *Osservazioni.* Such are our reflections "on the want of a moral or philosophical aim in the ornamental writings of the Italians;" on "love, as suggesting the constant theme and impulse to their poets;" on the evil tendency of their language, in seducing their writers into "an overweening attention to sound." There are few general reflections which have the good fortune not to require many, and sometimes very important, exceptions. The physiognomy of a nation, whether moral or intellectual, must be made up of those features which arrest the eye most frequently and forcibly on a wide survey of them; yet how many individual portraits, after all, may refuse to correspond with the prevailing one! The Bœotians were dull to a proverb;* yet the most

* "Sus Bœotica, auris Bœotica, Bœoticum ingenium."

inspired, in the most inspired region of Greek poetry, was a Bœotian. The most amusing of Greek prose writers was a Bœotian. Or, to take examples, when we find the "accurate Ginguené" speaking of "the *universal* corruption of taste in Italy during the seventeenth century," or Sismondi telling us that "the abuse of wit extinguished there, during that age, *every other species of talent*," we are obviously not to nail them down to a pedantic precision of language, or how are we to dispose of some of the finest poets and scholars Italy has ever produced,—of Chiabrera, Filicaja, Galileo, and other names sufficiently numerous to swell into a bulky quarto of Tiraboschi? The same pruning principle applied to writers who, like Montesquieu, Madame de Staël, and Schlegel, deal in general views, would go near to strip them of all respect or credibility.

But it is frivolous to multiply examples. Dante, Tasso, Alemanni, Guidi, Petrarch often, the generous Filicaja always, with, doubtless, very many others, afford an honorable exception to our remark on the want of a moral aim in the lighter walks of Italian letters, and to many of these, by indirect criticism, we accorded it in our article. But let any scholar cast his eye over the prolific productions of their romantic muse, which even Tiraboschi censures as "crude and insipid," * and Gravina deplores as having "excluded the light of truth" from his countrymen; † or on their thousand tales of pleasantry and love, which, since

* Letteratura Italiana, tom. vii. part. iii. s. 42.

† Ragion poetica, p. 14.

Boccaccio's example, have agreeably perpetuated the ingenious inventions of a barbarous age;* or round "the circle of frivolous extravagances," as Salfi† characterizes the burlesque novelties with which the Italian wits have regaled the laughter-loving appetite of their nation; or on their hecatombs of *amorous* lyrics alone; and he may accept, in these saturated varieties of the national literature, a decent apology, if not an ample justification, for our assertion.

But are we not to speak of "love as furnishing the great impulse to the Italian poet," and "as prevailing in his bosom far over every other affection or relation in life"? Have not their most illustrious writers, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Sannazarius, Tasso, nay, philosophic prelates like Bembo, politic statesmen like Lorenzo, embalmed the names of their mistresses in verse, until they have made them familiar in every corner of Italy as their own? Is not nearly half of the miscellaneous selection of lyrics, in the vulgar edition of

* The Italian *Novelle*, it is well known, were originally suggested by the French *Fabliaux* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It may be worthy of remark that, while in Italy these amusing fictions have been diligently propagated from Boccaccio to the present day, in England, although recommended by a genius like Chaucer, they have scarcely been adopted by a single writer. The same may be said of them in France, their native soil, with perhaps a solitary exception in the modern imitations by La Fontaine, himself inimitable.

† This learned Italian is now employed in completing the unfinished history of M. Ginguené. With deference to the opinions of the author of the "Osservazioni" (vide pp. 115, 116), we think he has shown in it a more independent and impartial criticism than his predecessor. His own countrymen seem to be of the same opinion, and in a recent flattering notice of his work they have qualified their general encomium with more than one rebuke on the severity of his strictures. Vide Antologia for April, 1824.

"Italian classics," exclusively amatory? Had Milton, Dryden, Pope, or, still more, such solid personages as Bishop Warburton or Dr. Johnson (whose "Tetty," we suspect, never stirred the doctor's poetic feeling), dedicated, not a passing sonnet, but whole volumes to their Beatrices, Lauras, and Leonoras, we think a critic might well be excused in regarding the tender passion as the *vivida vis* of the English author. Let us not be misunderstood, however, as implying that nothing but this amorous incense escapes from the Italian lyric muse. To the exceptions which the author of the *Osservazioni* has enumerated, he might have added, had not his modesty forbidden him, as inferior to none, the sacred melodies which adorn his own autobiography; above all, the magnificent canzone on the "Death of Leopold," which can derive nothing from our commendation, when a critic like Mathias has declared it to have "secured to its author a place on the Italian Parnassus, by the side of Petrarch and Chiabrera." *

As to our remark on the tendency of the soft Italian tones "to seduce their writers into an overweening attention to sound," we are surprised that this should have awakened two such grave pages of admonition from our censor. Why, we were speaking of

> "The Tuscan's siren tongue,
> That music in itself, whose sounds are song."

* A letter from Mr. Mathias, which fell into our hands some time since, concludes a complimentary analysis of the above canzone with this handsome eulogium: "After having read and reflected much on this wonderful production, I believe that, if Petrarch could have

We thought the remark had been as true as it was old. We cannot but think there is something in it, even now, as we are occasionally lost in the mellifluous redundances of Bembo or Boccaccio, those celebrated models of Italian eloquence. At any rate, our remark fell far short of the candid confession of Bettinelli, who, in speaking of historical writing, observes that "in this, as in every other department of literature, his countrymen have been more solicitous about *style*, and ingenious turns of thought, than utility or good philosophy." *

But we must hasten to the last, not by any means the least, offence recorded on the roll of our enormities. This is an ill-omened stricture on the poetical character of Metastasio, for which the author of the *Osservazioni*, after lavishing upon him a shower of golden compliments at our expense, proceeds to censure us as "wanting in respect to this famous man; as perspicacious only in detecting blemishes; as guilty of extravagant and unworthy expressions, which prove that we cannot have read or digested the works of this exalted dramatist, nor those of his biographers, nor of his critics." (Pp. 98–111.) And what, think you, gentle reader, invited these unsavory rebukes, with the dozen pages of panegyrical accompaniment on his predecessor? "The melodious rhythm of Tasso's verse has *none of the*

heard it, he would have assigned to its author a seat very near to his own, without requiring any other evidence of his vivacious, copious, and sublime genius."

* Risorgimento d'Italia, Introdus., tom. i. p. 14.

monotonous sweetness so cloying in Metastasio." In this italicized line lies the whole of our offending; no more.

We shall consult the comfort of our readers by disposing of this point as briefly as possible. We certainly do not feel, and we will not affect, that profound veneration for Metastasio which the author of the *Osservazioni* professes, and which may have legitimately descended to him with the inheritance of the Cæsarean laurel. We have always looked upon his *operas* as exhibiting an effeminacy of sentiment, a violent contrivance of incident, and an extravagance of character, that are not wholly to be vindicated by the constitution of the Musical Drama. But nothing of all this was intimated in our unfortunate suggestion; and, as we are unwilling to startle anew the principles or prejudices of our highly respectable censor, we shall content ourselves with bringing into view one or two stout authorities, behind whom we might have intrenched ourselves, and resign the field to him.

The author has presented his readers with an abstract of about forty pages of undiluted commendation on his favorite poet, by the Spaniard Arteaga. We have no objection to this; but, while he recommends them as the opinions of "a learned, judicious, and indubitably impartial critic," we think it would have been fair to temper these forty pages of commendation with some allusion to five-and-thirty pages of almost unmitigated censure which immediately follow them.*

* Le Rivoluzioni del Teatro musicale, etc., pp. 375, 410.

In the course of this censorious analysis, it may be noticed that the "impartial Arteaga," speaking of the common imputation of *monotony in the structure of Metastasio's verse, and of his periods,* far from acquitting him, expressly declines passing judgment upon it.

But we may find ample countenance for our "irreverent opinion" in that of Ugo Foscolo, a name of high consideration both as a poet and a critic, and whom, for his perspicacity in the latter vocation, our author, on another occasion, has himself cited and eulogized as his "magnus Apollo." Speaking incidentally of Metastasio, he observes, "To please the court of Vienna, the musicians, and the public of his day, and to gratify the delicacy of his own feminine taste, Metastasio has reduced his *language and versification to so limited a number of words, phrases, and cadences that they seem always the same,* and in the end produce only the effect of a flute, which conveys rather delightful melody than quick and distinct sensations." * To precisely the same effect speaks W. A. Schlegel, in his eighth lecture on Dramatic Literature, whose acknowledged excellence in this particular department of criticism may induce us to quote him, although a foreigner. These authorities are too pertinent and explicit to require the citation of any other, or to make it necessary, by a prolix but easy enumeration of extracts from the poet, more fully to establish our position.

"Hic aliquid plus
Quam satis est."

* Essays on Petrarch, p. 93.

We believe we are quite as weary as our readers of the very disagreeable office of dwelling on the defects of a literature so beautiful, and for which we feel so sincere an admiration, as the Italian. The severe impeachment made, both upon the spirit and the substance of our former remarks, by so accomplished a scholar as the author of the *Osservazioni,* has necessarily compelled us to this course in self-defence. The tedious parade of citations must be excused by the necessity of buoying up our opinions in debatable matters of taste by those whose authority alone our censor is disposed to admit,—that of his own countrymen. He has emphatically repeated his distrust of the capacity of foreigners to decide upon subjects of literary taste; yet the extraordinary diversity of opinion manifest between him and those eminent authorities whom we have quoted might lead us to anticipate but little correspondence in the national criticism. An acquaintance with Italian history will not serve to diminish our suspicions; and the feuds which, from the learned but querulous scholars of the fifteenth century to those of our own time, have divided her republic of letters, have not been always carried on with the bloodless weapons of scholastic controversy. *

That some assertions too unqualified, some

* Take two familiar examples: that of Caro and that of Marini. The adversary of the former poet, accused of murder, heresy, etc., was condemned by the Inquisition, and compelled to seek his safety in exile. The adversary of Marini, in an attempt to assassinate him, fortunately shot only a courtier of the King of Sardinia. In both cases, the wits of Italy, ranged under opposite banners, fought with incredible acrimony during the greater part of a century. The subject of fierce dispute, in both instances, was a *sonnet!*

errors or prejudices, should have escaped, in the course of fifty or sixty pages of remark, is to be expected from the most circumspect pen; but a benevolent critic, instead of fastening upon these, will embrace the spirit of the whole, and by this interpret and excuse any specific inaccuracy. It may not be easy to come up to the standard of our author's principles, it may be his partialities, in estimating the intellectual character of his country; but we think we can detect one source of his dissatisfaction with us, in his misconception of our views, which according to him, were that "a particular knowledge of the Italian should be widely diffused in America." This he quotes and requotes with peculiar emphasis, objecting it to us as perfectly inconsistent with our style of criticism. Now, in the first place, we made no such declaration. We intended only to give a veracious analysis of one branch of Italian letters. But, secondly, had such been our design, we doubt exceedingly, or rather we do not doubt, whether the best way of effecting it would be by indiscriminate panegyric. The amplification of beauties, and the prudish concealment of all defects, would carry with it an air of insincerity that must dispose the mind of every ingenuous reader to reject it. Perfection is not the lot of humanity more in Italy than elsewhere. Such intemperate panegyric is, moreover, unworthy of the great men who are the objects of it. They really shine with too brilliant a light to be darkened by a few spots; and to be tenacious of their defects is in some measure to distrust their genius. *Rien n'est beau que le vrai,*

is the familiar reflection of a critic whose general maxims in his art are often more sound than their particular application.

Notwithstanding the difficulty urged by Mr. Da Ponte of forming a correct estimate of a foreign language, the science of general literary criticism and history, which may be said to have entirely grown up within the last fifty years, has done much to eradicate prejudice and enlarge the circle of genuine knowledge. A century and a half ago, "the best of English critics," * in the opinion of Pope and Dryden, could institute a formal examination, and, of course, condemnation, of the plays of Shakspeare "by the practice of the ancients." The best of French critics,† in the opinion of every one, could condemn the "Orlando Furioso" for wandering from the rules of Horace; even Addison, in his triumphant vindication of the "Paradise Lost," seems most solicitous to prove its conformity with the laws of Aristotle; and a writer like Lope de Vega felt obliged to apologize for the independence with which he deviated from the dogmas of the same school and adapted his beautiful inventions in the drama to the peculiar genius of his own countrymen.‡ The

* "The Tragedies of the Last Age, considered and examined by the Practice of the Ancients," etc. By Thomas Rymer. London, 1678.

† "Dissertation critique sur l'Aventure de Joconde." Œuvres de Boileau, tom. ii.

‡ "Arte de hacer Comedias." Obras sueltas, tom. iv. p. 406.

"Y quando he de escribir una Comedia,
Encierro los preceptos con seis llaves;
Saco a Terencio y Plauto de mi estudio,
Para que no me den voces, que suele
Dar gritos la verdad en libros mudos," etc.

magnificent fables of Ariosto and Spenser were stigmatized as *barbarous,* because they were not *classical;* and the polite scholars of Europe sneered at "the bad taste which could prefer an 'Ariosto to a Virgil, a Romance to an Iliad.'"* But the reconciling spirit of modern criticism has interfered; the character, the wants of different nations and ages have been consulted; from the local beauties peculiar to each, the philosophic inquirer has deduced certain general principles of beauty applicable to all; petty national prejudices have been extinguished; and a difference of taste, which for that reason alone was before condemned as a deformity, is now admired as a beautiful variety in the order of nature.

The English, it must be confessed, can take little credit to themselves for this improvement. Their researches in literary history amount to little in their own language, and to nothing in any other. Warton, Johnson, and Campbell have indeed furnished an accurate inventory of their poetical wealth; but, except it be in the limited researches of Drake and of Dunlop, what record have we of all their rich and various prose? As to foreign literature, while other cultivated nations have been developing their views in voluminous and valuable treatises, the English have been profoundly

* See Lord Shaftesbury's "Advice to an Author;" a treatise of great authority in its day, but which could speak of the "*Gothic* Muse of Shakspeare, Fletcher, and Milton as lisping with stammering tongues, that nothing but the youth and rawness of the age could excuse!" Sir William Temple, with a purer taste, is not more liberal. The term *Gothic,* with these writers, is applied to much the same subjects with the modern term *Romantic,* with this difference: the latter is simply distinctive, while the former was also an opprobrious epithet.

mute.* Yet for several reasons they might be expected to make the best general critics in the world, and the collision of their judgments in this matter with those of the other European scholars might produce new and important results.

The author of the *Osservazioni* has accused us of being too much under the influence of his enemies the French (p. 112). There are slender grounds for this imputation. We have always looked upon this fastidious people as the worst general critics possible; and we scarcely once alluded to their opinions in the course of our article without endeavoring to controvert them. The truth is, while they have contrived their own system with infinite skill, and are exceedingly acute in detecting the least violation of it, they seem incapable of understanding why it should not be applied to every other people, however opposite

* The late translation of "Sismondi's Southern Europe" is the only one, we believe, which the English possess of a detailed literary history. The discriminating taste of this sensible Frenchman has been liberalized by his familiarity with the languages of the North. His knowledge, however, is not always equal to his subject, and the credit of his opinions is not unfrequently due to another. The historian of the "Italian Republics" may be supposed to be at home in treating of Italian letters, and this is undoubtedly the strongest part of his work; but in what relates to Spain he has helped himself "manibus plenis" from Bouterwek, much too liberally, indeed, for the scanty acknowledgments made by him to the accurate and learned German. Page upon page is *literally translated* from him. Sismondi's work, however, is intrinsically valuable for its philosophical illustrations of the *character* of the Spaniards by the peculiarities of their literature. His analysis of the national drama, as opposed to that of Schlegel, is also extremely ingenious. Is it not more sound than that of the German? We trust that this hitherto untrodden field in our language will be entered before long by one of our own scholars, whose researches have enabled him to go much more extensively into the Spanish department than either of his predecessors.

its character from their own. The consequence is obvious. Voltaire, whose elevated views sometimes advanced him to the level of the generous criticism of our own day, is by no means an exception. His Commentaries on Corneille are filled with the finest reflections imaginable on that eminent poet, or, rather, on the French drama; but the application of these same principles to the productions of his neighbors leads him into the grossest absurdities. "Addison's Cato is the only well-written tragedy in England." "Hamlet is a barbarous production, that would not be endured by the meanest populace in France or Italy." "Lope de Vega and Calderon familiarized their countrymen with all the extravagances of a gross and ridiculous drama." But the French theatre, modelled upon the ancient Greek, can boast "of more than twenty pieces which surpass their most admirable *chefs-d'œuvre,* without excepting those of Sophocles or Euripides." So in other walks of poetry, Milton, Tasso, Ercilla, occasionally fare no better. "Who would dare to talk to Boileau, Racine, Molière, of an epic poem upon Adam and Eve?" Voltaire had one additional reason for the exaltation of his native literature at the expense of every other: he was himself at the head, or aspired to be, of every department in it.

Madame de Staël is certainly an eminent exception, in very many particulars, to the general character of her nation. Her defects, indeed, are rather of an opposite cast. Instead of the narrowness of conventional precept, she may be sometimes accused of vague and visionary theory; in-

stead of nice specific details, of dealing too freely in abstract and independent propositions. Her faults are of the German school, which she may have in part imbibed from her intimacy with their literature (no common circumstance with her countrymen), from her residence in Germany, and from her long intimacy with one of its most distinguished scholars, who lived under the same roof with her for many years. But, with all her faults, she is entitled to the praise of having shown a more enlarged and truly philosophical spirit of criticism than any of her countrymen.

The English have never yielded to the arbitrary legislation of academies; their literature has at different periods exhibited all the varieties of culture which have prevailed over the other European tongues; and their language, derived both from the Latin and the Teutonic idiom, affords them a much greater facility for entering into the spirit of foreign letters than can be enjoyed by any other European people, whose language is derived almost exclusively from one or the other of these elements. With all these peculiar facilities for literary history and criticism, why, with their habitual freedom of thought, have they remained in it so far behind most other cultivated nations ?

SPANISH LITERATURE.*

(January, 1852.)

LITERARY history is the least familiar kind of historical writing. It is, in some respects, the most difficult, requiring certainly far the most laborious study. The facts for civil history we gather from personal experience, or from the examination of a comparatively few authors, whose statements the historian transfers, with such modification and commentary as he pleases, to his own pages. But in literary history the books are the facts, and pretty substantial ones in many cases, which are not to be mastered at a glance, or on the report of another. It is a tedious process to read through a library in order to decide that the greater part is probably not worth reading at all.

Literary history must come late in the intellectual development of a nation. It is the history of books, and there can be no history of books till books are written. It presupposes, moreover, a critical knowledge,—an acquaintance with the principles of taste, which can come only from a wide study and comparison of models. It is therefore, necessarily the product of an advanced state of civilization and mental culture.

Although criticism, in one form or another, was

* "History of Spanish Literature." By George Ticknor. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1849: 3 vols. 8vo.

studied and exemplified by the ancients, yet they made no progress in direct literary history. Neither has it been cultivated by all the nations of modern Europe. At least, in some of them it has met with very limited success. In England, one might have thought, from the free scope given to the expression of opinion, it would have flourished beyond all other countries. But Italy, and even Spain, with all the restraint imposed on intellectual movement, have done more in this way than the whole Anglo-Saxon race. The very freedom with which the English could enter on the career of political action has not only withdrawn them from the more quiet pursuits of letters, but has given them a decided taste for descriptions of those stirring scenes in which they or their fathers have taken part. Hence the great preponderance with them, as with us, of civil history over literary.

It may be further remarked that the monastic institutions of Roman Catholic countries have been peculiarly favorable to this, as to some other kinds of composition. The learned inmates of the cloister have been content to solace their leisure with those literary speculations and inquiries which had no immediate connection with party excitement and the turmoils of the world. The best literary histories, from whatever cause, in Spain and in Italy, have been the work of members of some one or other of the religious fraternities.

Still another reason of the attention given to this study in most of those countries may be found in the embarrassments existing there to the general pursuit of science, which have limited the powers

to the more exclusive cultivation of works of imagination, and those other productions of elegant literature that come most properly within the province of taste and of literary criticism.

Yet in England, during the last generation, in which the mind has been unusually active, if there have been few elaborate works especially devoted to criticism, the electric fluid has been imperceptibly carried off from a thousand minor points, in the form of essays and periodical reviews, which cover nearly the whole ground of literary inquiry, both foreign and domestic. The student who has the patience to consult these scattered notices, if he cannot find a system ready made to his hands, may digest one for himself by a comparison of contradictory judgments on every topic under review. Yet it may be doubted if the multitude of cross-lights thrown at random over his path will not serve rather to perplex than to enlighten him.

Wherever we are to look for the reasons, the fact will hardly be disputed, that, since Warton's learned fragment, no general literary history has been produced in England which is likely to endure, with the exception of Hallam's late work, that, under the modest title of an "Introduction," gives a general survey of the scientific and literary culture of Europe during three centuries. If the English have done so little in this way for their own literature, it can hardly be expected that they should do much for that of their neighbors. If they had extended their researches to the Continent, it might probably have been in the direction of Spain; for no country has been made with them

the subject of so large historical investigation. One or two good histories devoted to Italy and Germany, as many to the revolutionary period of France—the country with which they are most nearly brought into contact—make up the sum of what is of positive value in this way. But for Spain, a series of writers—Robertson, Watson, Dunlop, Lord Mahon, Coxe, some of the highest order, all respectable—have exhibited the political annals of the monarchy under the Austrian and Bourbon dynasties. Even at the present moment, a still livelier interest seems to be awakened to the condition of this romantic land. Two excellent works, by Head and by Stirling,—the latter of especial value,—have made the world acquainted, for the first time, with the rich treasures of art in the Peninsula. And last, not least, Ford, in his Hand-book and other works, has joined to a curious erudition that knowledge of the Spanish character and domestic institutions that can be obtained only from singular acuteness of observation combined with a long residence in the country he describes.

Spain, too, has been the favorite theme of more than one of our own writers, in history and romance; and now the long list is concluded by the attempt of the work before us to trace the progress of intellectual culture in the Peninsula.

No work on a similar extended plan is to be found in Spain itself. Their own literary histories have been chiefly limited to the provinces, or to particular departments of letters. We may except, indeed, the great work of Father Andrés,

which, comprehending the whole circle of European science and literature, left but a comparatively small portion to his own country. To his name may also be added that of Lampillas, whose work, however, from its rambling and its controversial character, throws but a very partial and unsatisfactory glance on the topics which he touches.

The only books on a similar plan, which cover the same ground with the one before us, are the histories of Bouterwek and Sismondi. The former was written as part of a great plan for the illustration of European art and science since the revival of learning,—projected by a literary association in Göttingen. The plan, as is too often the case in such copartnerships, was very imperfectly executed. The best fruits of it were the twelve volumes of Bouterwek, on the elegant literature of modern Europe. That of Spain occupies one of these volumes.

It is written with acuteness, perspicuity, and candor. Notwithstanding the writer is perhaps too much under the influence of certain German theories then fashionable, his judgments, in the main, are temperate and sound, and he is entitled to great credit as the earliest pioneer in this untrodden field of letters. The great defect in the book is the want of proper materials on which to rest these judgments. Of this the writer more than once complains. It is a capital defect, not to be compensated by any talent or diligence in the author. For in this kind of writing, as we have

said, books are facts, the very stuff out of which the history is to be made.

Bouterwek had command of the great library of Göttingen. But it would not be safe to rely on any one library, however large, for supplying all the materials for an extended literary history. Above all, this is true of Spanish literature. The difficulty of making a literary collection in Spain is far greater than in most other parts of Europe. The booksellers' trade there is a very different affair from what it is in more favored regions. The taste for reading, is not, or, rather, has not been sufficiently active to create a demand for the republication always of even the best authors, the ancient editions of whose works have become scarce and most difficult to be procured. The impediment to a free expression of opinion has condemned many more works to the silence of manuscript. And these manuscripts are preserved, or, to say truth, buried, in the collections of old families, or of public institutions, where it requires no ordinary interest with the proprietors, private or public, to be allowed to disinter them. Some of the living Spanish scholars are now busily at work in these useful explorations, the result of which they are giving, from time to time, to the world in the form of *livraisons* or numbers, which seem likely to form an important contribution to historical science. For the impulse thus given to these patriotic labors the world is mainly indebted to the late venerable Navarrete, who, in his own person, led the way by the publication of a series of important historical documents. It is only from

these obscure and uncertain repositories, and from booksellers' stalls, that the more rare and recondite works in which Spain is so rich can be procured; and it is only under great advantages that the knowledge of their places of deposit can be obtained, and that, having obtained it, the works can be had, at a price proportioned to their rarity. The embarrassments caused by this circumstance have been greatly diminished under the more liberal spirit of the present day, which on a few occasions has even unlocked the jealous archives of Simancas, that Robertson, backed by the personal authority of the British ambassador, strove in vain to penetrate.

Spanish literature occupies also one volume of Sismondi's popular work on the culture of Southern Europe. But Sismondi was far less instructed in literary criticism than his German predecessor, of whose services he has freely availed himself in the course of his work. Indeed, he borrows from him not merely thoughts, but language, translating from the German page after page and incorporating it with his own eloquent commentary. He does not hesitate to avow his obligations; but they prove at once his own deficiencies in the performance of his critical labors as well as in the possession of the requisite materials. Sismondi's ground was civil history, whose great lessons no one had meditated more deeply; and it is in the application of these lessons to the character of the Spaniards, and in tracing the influence of that character on their literature, that a great merit of his work consists. He was, more-

over, a Frenchman,—or, at least, a Frenchman in language and education; and he was prepared, therefore, to correct some of the extravagant theories of the German critics, and to rectify some of their judgments by a moral standard which they had entirely overlooked in their passion for the beautiful.

With all his merits, however, and the additional grace of a warm and picturesque style, his work, like that of Bouterwek, must be admitted to afford only the outlines of the great picture, which they have left to other hands to fill up in detail and on a far more extended plan. To accomplish this great task is the purpose of the volumes before us; we are now to inquire with what result. But, before entering on the inquiry, we will give some account of the preparatory training of the writer, and the materials which he has brought together.

Mr. Ticknor, who now first comes before the world in the avowed character of an author, has long enjoyed a literary reputation which few authors who have closed their career might not envy. While quite a young man, he was appointed to fill the chair of Modern Literature in Harvard College, on the foundation of the late Abiel Smith, Esq., a distinguished merchant of Boston. When he received the appointment, Mr. Ticknor had been some time in Europe pursuing studies in philology. He remained there two or three years afterwards, making an absence of above four years in all. A part of this period was passed in diligent study at Göttingen. In Paris he explored, under able teachers, the difficult

Romance dialects, the medium of the beautiful Provençal.

During his residence in Spain he perfected himself in the Castilian, and established an intimacy with her most eminent scholars, who aided him in the collection of rare books and manuscripts, to which he assiduously devoted himself. It is a proof of the literary consideration which, even at that early age, he had obtained in the society of Madrid, that he was elected a corresponding member of the Royal Academy of History. His acquisitions in the early literature of modern Europe attracted the notice of Sir Walter Scott, who, in a letter to Southey, printed in Lockhart's Life, speaks of his young guest (Mr. Ticknor was then at Abbotsford) as a "wonderful fellow for romantic lore."

On his return home, Mr. Ticknor entered at once on his academic labors, and delivered a series of lectures on the Castilian and French literatures, as well as on some portions of the English, before successive classes, which he continued to repeat, with the occasional variation of oral instruction, during the fifteen years he remained at the University.

We well remember the sensation produced on the first delivery of these Lectures, which served to break down the barrier which had so long confined the student to a converse with antiquity; they opened to him a free range among those great masters of modern literature who had hitherto been veiled in the obscurity of a foreign idiom. The influence of this instruction was soon visible

in the higher education as well as the literary ardor shown by the graduates. So decided was the impulse thus given to the popular sentiment that considerable apprehension was felt lest modern literature was to receive a disproportionate share of attention in the scheme of collegiate education.

After the lapse of fifteen years so usefully employed, Mr. Ticknor resigned his office, and, thus released from his academic labors, paid a second visit to Europe, where, in a second residence of three years, he much enlarged the amount and the value of his literary collection. In the more perfect completion of this he was greatly assisted by the professor of Arabic in the University of Madrid, Don Pascual de Gayangos, a scholar to whose literary sympathy and assistance more than one American writer has been indebted, and who to a profound knowledge of Oriental literature unites one equally extensive in the European.

With these aids, and his own untiring efforts, Mr. Ticknor succeeded in bringing together a body of materials in print and manuscript, for the illustration of the Castilian, such as probably has no rival either in public or private collections. This will be the more readily believed when we find that nearly every author employed in the composition of this great work—with the exception of a few, for which he has made ample acknowledgments—is to be found on his own shelves. We are now to consider in what manner he has availed himself of this inestimable collection of materials.

The title of the book—the " History of Spanish

Literature"—is intended to comprehend all that relates to the poetry of the country, its romances, and works of imagination of every sort, its criticism and eloquence,—in short, whatever can be brought under the head of elegant literature. Even its chronicles and regular histories are included; for, though scientific in their import, they are still, in respect to their style and their execution as works of art, brought into the department of ornamental writing. In Spain, freedom of thought, or, at least, the free expression of it, has been so closely fettered that science, in its strictest sense, has made little progress in that unhappy country, and a history of its elegant literature is, more than in any other land, a general history of its intellectual progress.

The work is divided into three great periods, having reference to time rather than to any philosophical arrangement. Indeed, Spanish literature affords less facilities for such an arrangement than the literature of many other countries, as that of England and of Italy, for example, where, from different causes, there have been periods exhibiting literary characteristics that stamp them with a peculiar physiognomy. For example, in England we have the age of Elizabeth, the age of Queen Anne, our own age. In Italy, the philosophical arrangement seems to correspond well enough with the chronological. Thus, the Trecentisti, the Seicentisti, convey ideas as distinct and as independent of each other as the different schools of Italian art. But in Spain, literature is too deeply tinctured at its fountain-head not to

retain somewhat of the primitive coloring through the whole course of its descent. Patriotism, chivalrous loyalty, religious zeal, under whatever modification and under whatever change of circumstances, have constituted, as Mr. Ticknor has well insisted, the enduring elements of the national literature. And it is this obvious preponderance of these elements throughout which makes the distribution into separate masses on any philosophical principle extremely difficult. A proof of this is afforded by the arrangement now adopted by Mr. Ticknor himself, in the limit assigned to his first period, which is considerably shorter than that assigned to it in his original Lectures. The alteration, as we shall take occasion to notice hereafter, is, in our judgment, a decided improvement.

The first great division embraces the whole time from the earliest appearance of a written document in the Castilian to the commencement of the sixteenth century, the reign of Charles the Fifth, —a period of nearly four centuries.

At the very outset we are met by the remarkable poem of the Cid, that primitive epic, which, like the Niebelungenlied or the Iliad, stands as the traditional legend of an heroic age, exhibiting all the freshness and glow which belong to the morning of a nation's existence. The name of the author, as is often the case with those memorials of the olden time, when the writer thought less of himself than of his work, has not come down to us. Even the date of its composition is uncertain, —probably before the year 1200; a century earlier

than the poem of Dante; a century and a half before Petrarch and Chaucer. The subject of it, as its name imports, is the achievements of the renowned Ruy Diaz de Bivar,—*the Cid, the Campeador,* "the lord, the champion," as he was fondly styled by his countrymen as well as by his Moorish foes, in commemoration of his prowess, chiefly displayed against the infidel. The versification is the fourteen-syllable measure, artless, and exhibiting all the characteristics of an unformed idiom, but, with its rough melody, well suited to the expression of the warlike and stirring incidents in which it abounds. It is impossible to peruse it without finding ourselves carried back to the heroic age of Castile; and we feel that in its simple and cordial portraiture of existing manners we get a more vivid impression of the feudal period than is to be gathered from the more formal pages of the chronicler. Heeren has pronounced that the poems of Homer were one of the principal bonds which held the Grecian states together. The assertion may seem extravagant; but we can well understand that a poem like that of the Cid, with all its defects as a work of art, by its proud historic recollections of an heroic age should do much to nourish the principle of patriotism in the bosoms of the people.

From the "Cid" Mr. Ticknor passes to the review of several other poems of the thirteenth and some of the fourteenth century. They are usually of considerable length. The Castilian muse, at the outset, seems to have delighted in works of *longue haleine.* Some of them are of a

satirical character, directing their shafts against the clergy with an independence which seems to have marked also the contemporaneous productions of other nations, but which, in Spain, at least, was rarely found at a later period. Others of these venerable productions are tinged with the religious bigotry which enters so largely into the best portions of the Castilian literature.

One of the most remarkable poems of the period is the *Danza General,*— the "Dance of Death." The subject is not original with the Spaniards, and has been treated by the bards of other nations in the elder time. It represents the ghastly revels of the dread monarch, to which all are summoned, of every degree, from the potentate to the peasant.

"It is founded on the well-known fiction, so often illustrated both in painting and in verse during the Middle Ages, that all men, of all conditions, are summoned to the Dance of Death; a kind of spiritual masquerade, in which the different ranks of society, from the Pope to the young child, appear dancing with the skeleton form of Death. In this Spanish version it is striking and picturesque,—more so, perhaps, than in any other,—the ghastly nature of the subject being brought into a very lively contrast with the festive tone of the verses, which frequently recalls some of the better parts of those flowing stories that now and then occur in the 'Mirror for Magistrates.'

"The first seven stanzas of the Spanish poem constitute a prologue, in which Death issues his summons partly in his own person, and partly in that of a preaching friar, ending thus:

"'Come to the Dance of Death, all ye whose fate
By birth is mortal, be ye great or small;
And willing come, nor loitering, nor late,
Else force shall bring you struggling to my thrall:
For since yon friar hath uttered loud his call
To penitence and godliness sincere,
He that delays must hope no waiting here;
For still the cry is, Haste! and, Haste to all!'

"Death now proceeds, as in the old pictures and poems, to summon, first the Pope, then cardinals, kings, bishops, and so on, down to day-laborers; all of whom are forced to join his mortal dance, though each first makes some remonstrance that indicates surprise, horror, or reluctance. The call to youth and beauty is spirited:

"'Bring to my dance, and bring without delay,
Those damsels twain you see so bright and fair;
They came, but came not in a willing way,
To list my chants of mortal grief and care:
Nor shall the flowers and roses fresh they wear,
Nor rich attire, avail their forms to save.
They strive in vain who strive against the grave;
It may not be; my wedded brides they are.'"

Another poem, of still higher pretensions, but, like the last, still in manuscript, is the *Poema de José*,—the "Poem of Joseph." It is probably the work of one of those Spanish Arabs who remained under the Castilian domination after the great body of their countrymen had retreated. It was written in the Castilian dialect, but in Arabic characters, as was not very uncommon with the writings of the Moriscoes. The story of Joseph is told, moreover, conformably to the version of the Koran, instead of that of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The manner in which the Spanish and the

Arabic races were mingled together after the great invasion produced a strange confusion in their languages. The Christians, who were content to dwell in their old places under the Moslem rule, while they retained their own language, not unfrequently adopted the alphabetical characters of their conquerors. Even the coins struck by some of the ancient Castilian princes, as they recovered their territory from the invaders, were stamped with Arabic letters. Not unfrequently the archives and municipal records of the Spanish cities, for a considerable time after their restoration to their own princes, were also written in Arabic characters. On the other hand, as the great inundation gradually receded, the Moors who lingered behind under the Spanish sway often adopted the language of their conquerors, but retained their own written alphabet. In other words, the Christians kept their language and abandoned their alphabetical characters; while the Moslems kept their alphabetical characters and abandoned their language. The contrast is curious, and may perhaps be accounted for by the fact that the superiority conceded by the Spaniards to the Arabic literature in this early period led the few scholars among them to adopt, for their own compositions, the characters in which that literature was written. The Moriscoes, on the other hand, did what was natural when they retained their peculiar writing, to which they had been accustomed in the works of their countrymen, while they conformed to the Castilian language, to which they had become accustomed in daily intercourse with the Spaniard.

However explained, the fact is curious. But it is time we should return to the Spanish Arab poem.

We give the following translation of some of its verses by Mr. Ticknor, with his few prefatory remarks:

"On the first night after the outrage, Jusuf, as he is called in the poem, when travelling along in charge of a negro, passes a cemetery on a hill-side where his mother lies buried.

"And when the negro heeded not, that guarded him behind,
From off the camel Jusuf sprang, on which he rode confined,
And hastened, with all speed, his mother's grave to find,
Where he knelt and pardon sought, to relieve his troubled mind.

"He cried, 'God's grace be with thee still, O Lady mother dear!
O mother, you would sorrow, if you looked upon me here;
For my neck is bound with chains, and I live in grief and fear,
Like a traitor by my brethren sold, like a captive to the spear.

"'They have sold me! they have sold me! though I never did them harm;
They have torn me from my father, from his strong and living arm,
By art and cunning they enticed me, and by falsehood's guilty charm,
And I go a base-bought captive, full of sorrow and alarm.'

"But now the negro looked about, and knew that he was gone;
For no man could be seen, and the camel came alone;
So he turned his sharpened ear, and caught the wailing tone,
Where Jusuf, by his mother's grave, lay making heavy moan.

"And the negro hurried up, and gave him there a blow;
So quick and cruel was it, that it instant laid him low:
'A base-born wretch,' he cried aloud, 'a base-born thief art thou:
Thy masters, when we purchased thee, they told us it was so.

"But Jusuf answered straight, 'Nor thief nor wretch am I;
My mother's grave is this, and for pardon here I cry;
I cry to Allah's power, and send my prayer on high,
That, since I never wronged thee, his curse may on thee lie.'

"And then all night they travelled on, till dawned the coming day,
When the land was sore tormented with a whirlwind's furious sway;
The sun grew dark at noon, their hearts sunk in dismay,
And they knew not, with their merchandise, to seek or make their way."

The manuscript of the piece, containing about twelve hundred verses, though not entirely perfect, is in Mr. Ticknor's hands, with its original Arabic characters converted into the Castilian. He has saved it from the chances of time by printing it at length in his Appendix, accompanied by the following commendations, which, to one practised in the old Castilian literature, will probably not be thought beyond its deserts:

"There is little, as it seems to me, in the early narrative poetry of any modern nation better worth reading than this old Morisco version of the story of Joseph. Parts of it overflow with the tenderest natural affection; other parts are deeply pathetic, and everywhere it bears the impress of the extraordinary state of manners and society that gave it birth. From several passages, it may be inferred that it was publicly recited, and even now, as we read it, we fall unconsciously into a long-drawn chant, and seem to hear the voices of Arabian camel-drivers, or of Spanish muleteers, as the Oriental or the romantic tone happens to prevail. I am acquainted with nothing in the form of the old metrical romance that is more attractive, —nothing that is so peculiar, original, and separate from everything else of the same class."

With these anonymous productions, Mr. Ticknor enters into the consideration of others from

an acknowledged source, among which are those of the Prince Don Juan Manuel and Alfonso the Tenth, or Alfonso the Wise, as he is usually termed. He was one of those rare men who seem to be possessed of an almost universal genius. His tastes would have been better suited to a more refined period. He was, unfortunately, so far in advance of his age that his age could not fully profit by his knowledge. He was raised so far above the general level of his time that the light of his genius, though it reached to distant generations, left his own in a comparative obscurity. His great work was the code of the *Siete Partidas*,—little heeded in his own day, though destined to become the basis of Spanish jurisprudence both in the Old World and in the New.

Alfonso caused the Bible, for the first time, to be translated into the Castilian. He was an historian, and led the way in the long line of Castilian writers in that department, by his *Crónica General*. He aspired also to the laurel of the Muses. His poetry is still extant in the Gallician dialect, which the monarch thought might in the end be the cultivated dialect of his kingdom. The want of a settled capital, or, to speak more correctly, the want of civilization, had left the different elements of the language contending, as it were, for the mastery. The result was still uncertain at the close of the thirteenth century. Alfonso himself did, probably, more than any other to settle it, by his prose compositions,—by the *Siete Partidas* and his Chronicle, as well as by the vernacular version of the Scriptures. The Galli-

cian became the basis of the language of the sister-kingdom of Portugal, and the generous dialect of Castile became, in Spain, the language of the court and of literature.

Alfonso directed his attention also to mathematical science. His astronomical observations are held in respect at the present day. But, as Mariana sarcastically intimates, while he was gazing at the stars he forgot the earth, and lost his kingdom. His studious temper was ill accommodated to the stirring character of the times. He was driven from his throne by his factious nobles; and in a letter written not long before his death, of which Mr. Ticknor gives a translation, the unhappy monarch pathetically deplores his fate and the ingratitude of his subjects. Alfonso the Tenth seemed to have at command every science but that which would have been of more worth to him than all the rest,—the science of government. He died in exile, leaving behind him the reputation of being the wisest fool in Christendom.

In glancing over the list of works which, from their anomalous character as well as their antiquity, are arranged by Mr. Ticknor in one class, as introductory to his history, we are struck with the great wealth of the period,—not great, certainly, compared with that of an age of civilization, but as compared with the productions of most other countries in this portion of the Middle Ages. Much of this ancient lore, which may be said to constitute the foundations of the national literature, has been but imperfectly known to the Spaniards themselves; and we have to acknowledge our

obligations to Mr. Ticknor, not only for the diligence with which he has brought it to light, but for the valuable commentaries, in text and notes, which supply all that could reasonably be demanded, both in a critical and bibliographical point of view. To estimate the extent of this information, we must compare it with what we have derived on the same subject from his predecessors; where the poverty of original materials, as well as of means for illustrating those actually possessed, is apparent at a glance. Sismondi, with some art, conceals his poverty, by making the most of the little finery at his command. Thus, his analysis of the poem of the Cid, which he had carefully read, together with his prose translation of no inconsiderable amount, covers a fifth of what he has to say on the whole period, embracing more than four centuries. He has one fine bit of gold in his possession, and he makes the most of it by hammering it out into a superficial extent altogether disproportionate to its real value.

Our author distributes the productions which occupy the greater part of the remainder of his first period into four great classes,—Ballads, Chronicles, Romances of Chivalry, and the Drama. The mere enumeration suggests the idea of that rude, romantic age, when the imagination, impatient to find utterance, breaks through the impediments of an unformed dialect, or, rather, converts it into an instrument for its purposes. Before looking at the results, we must briefly notice the circumstances under which they were effected.

The first occupants of the Peninsula who left

abiding traces of their peculiar civilization were the Romans. Six-tenths of the languages now spoken are computed to be derived from them.* Then came the Visigoths, bringing with them the peculiar institutions of the Teutonic races. And lastly, after the lapse of three centuries, came the great Saracen inundation, which covered the whole land up to the northern mountains, and, as it slowly receded, left a fertilizing principle, that gave life to much that was good as well as evil in the character and literature of the Spaniards. It was near the commencement of the eighth century that the great battle was fought, on the banks of the Guadalete, which decided the fate of Roderic, the last of the Goths, and of his monarchy. It was to the Goths—the Spaniards, as their descendants were called—what the battle of Hastings was to the English. The Arab conquerors rode over the country, as completely its masters as were the Normans of Britain. But they dealt more mercifully with the vanquished. The Koran, tribute, or the sword were the terms offered by the victors. Many were content to remain under Moslem rule, in the tolerated enjoyment of their religion, and, to some extent, of their laws. Those of nobler metal withdrew to the rocks of the Asturias; and every muleteer or water-carrier who emigrates from this barren spot glories in his birthplace as of itself a patent of nobility.

Then came the struggle against the Saracen in-

* The Vandals preceded the Visigoths. Their sojourn in the land is commemorated by the name Andalusia (formerly Vandalusia).—M.

vaders,— that long crusade to be carried on for centuries,—in which the ultimate triumph of a handful of Christians over the large and flourishing empire of the Moslems is the most glorious of the triumphs of the Cross upon record. But it was the work of eight centuries. During the first of these the Spaniards scarcely ventured beyond their fastnesses. The conquerors occupied the land, and settled in greatest strength over the pleasant places of the South, so congenial with their own voluptuous climate in the East. Then rose the empire of Córdova, which, under the sway of the Omeyades, rivalled in splendor and civilization the caliphate of Bagdad. Poetry, philosophy, letters, everywhere flourished. Academies and gymnasiums were founded, and Aristotle was expounded by commentators who acquired a glory not inferior to that of the Stagirite himself. This state of things continued after the Córdovan empire had been broken into fragments, when Seville, Murcia, Malaga, and the other cities which still flourished among the ruins continued to be centres of a civilization that shone bright amid the darkness of the Middle Ages.

Meanwhile, the Spaniards, strong in their religion, their Gothic institutions, and their poverty, had emerged from their fastnesses in the North, and brought their victorious banner as far as the Douro. In three centuries more, they had advanced their line of conquest only to the Tagus. But their progress, though slow, was irresistible, till at length the Moslems, of all their proud possessions, retained only the petty territory of Gra-

nada. On this little spot, however, they made a stand for more than two centuries, and bade defiance to the whole Christian power; while at the same time, though sunk in intellectual culture, they surpassed their best days in the pomp of their architecture and in the magnificence of living characteristic of the East. At the close of the fifteenth century, this Arabian tale—the most splendid episode in the Mohammedan annals—was brought to an end by the fall of Granada before the arms of Ferdinand and Isabella.

Such were the strange influences which acted on the Spanish character, and on the earliest development of its literature,—influences so peculiar that it is no wonder they should have produced results to which no other part of Europe has furnished a parallel:—the Oriental and the European for eight centuries brought into contact with one another, yet, though brought into contact, too different in blood, laws, and religion ever to coalesce. Unlike the Saxons and Normans, who, sprung from a common stock, with a common faith were gradually blended into one people, in Spain the conflicting elements could never mingle. No length of time could give the Arab a right to the soil. He was still an intruder. His only right was the right of the sword. He held his domain on the condition of perpetual war,—the war of race against race, of religion against religion. This was the inheritance of the Spaniard, as well as of the Moslem, for eight hundred years. What remarkable qualities was this situation not calculated to call out!—loyalty, heroism, the patriotic

feeling, and the loftier feeling of religious enthusiasm. What wonder that the soldier of the Cross should fancy that the arm of Heaven was stretched out to protect him?—that St. Jago should do battle for him with his celestial chivalry?—that miracles should cease to be miracles?—that superstition, in short, should be the element, the abiding element, of the national character? Yet this religious enthusiasm, in the early ages, was tempered by charity towards a foe whom even the Christian was compelled to respect for his superior civilization. But as the latter gained the ascendant, enthusiasm was fanned by the crafty clergy into fanaticism. As the Moslem scale became more and more depressed, fanaticism rose to intolerance, and intolerance ended in persecution when the victor was converted into the victim. It is a humiliating story,—more humiliating even to the oppressors than to the oppressed.

The literature all the while, with chameleon-like sensibility, took the color of the times; and it is for this reason that we have always dwelt with greater satisfaction on the earlier period of the national literature, rude though it be, with its cordial, free, and high romantic bearing, than on the later period of its glory,—brilliant in an intellectual point of view, but in its moral aspect dark and unrelenting.

Mr. Ticknor has been at much pains to unfold these peculiarities of the Castilian character, in order to explain by them the peculiarities of the literature, and indeed to show their reciprocal action on each other. He has devoted occasional

chapters to this subject, not the least interesting in his volumes, making the history of the literature a running commentary on that of the nation, and thus furnishing curious information to the political student, no less than to the student of letters. His acute, and at the same time accurate, observations, imbued with a spirit of sound philosophy, give the work a separate value, and raise it above the ordinary province of literary criticism.

But it is time that we should turn to the ballads, —or *romances,* as they are called in Spain,—the first of the great divisions already noticed. Nowhere does this popular minstrelsy flourish to the same extent as in Spain. The condition of the country, which converted every peasant into a soldier and filled his life with scenes of stirring and romantic incident, may in part account for it. We have ballads of chivalry, of the national history, of the Moorish wars, mere domestic ballads,—in short, all the varieties of which such simple poetical narratives are susceptible. The most attractive of these to the Spaniards, doubtless, were those devoted to the national heroes. The Cid here occupies a large space. His love, his loyalty, his invincible prowess against the enemies of God, are all celebrated in the frank and cordial spirit of a primitive age. They have been chronologically arranged into a regular series,—as far as the date could be conjectured,—like the Robin Hood ballads in England, so as to form a tolerably complete narrative of his life. It is interesting to observe with what fondness the Spaniards are ever ready to turn to their ancient hero, the very type of Cas-

tilian chivalry, and linked by so many glorious recollections with the heroic age of their country.

The following version of one of these ballads, by Mr. Ticknor, will give a fair idea of the original. The time chosen is the occasion of a summons made by the Cid to Queen Urraca to surrender her castle, which held out against the arms of the warrior's sovereign, Sancho the Brave:

"Away! away! proud Roderic!
Castilian proud, away!
Bethink thee of that olden time,
That happy, honored day,
When, at St. James's holy shrine,
Thy knighthood first was won;
When Ferdinand, my royal sire,
Confessed thee for a son.
He gave thee then thy knightly arms,
My mother gave thy steed;
Thy spurs were buckled by these hands,
That thou no grace might'st need.
And had not chance forbid the vow,
I thought with thee to wed;
But Count Lozano's daughter fair
Thy happy bride was led.
With her came wealth, an ample store,
But power was mine, and state:
Broad lands are good, and have their grace,
But he that reigns is great.
Thy wife is well; thy match was wise;
Yet, Roderic! at thy side
A vassal's daughter sits by thee,
And not a royal bride!"

Our author has also given a pleasing version of the beautiful *romance* of "*Fonte frida, fonte frida,*"—"Cooling fountain, cooling fountain,"—which we are glad to see rendered faithfully, instead of following the example of Dr. Percy, in his version of the fine old ballad in

a similar simple style, "*Rio verde, rio verde,*" which we remember he translates by "Gentle river, gentle river," etc. Indeed, to do justice to Mr. Ticknor's translations we should have the text before us. Nowhere do we recall so close fidelity to the original, unless in Cary's Dante. Such fidelity does not always attain the object of conveying the best idea of the original. But in this humble poetry it is eminently successful. To give these rude gems a polish would be at once to change their character and defeat the great object of our author,— to introduce his readers to the peculiar culture of a primitive age.

A considerable difficulty presents itself in finding a suitable measure for the English version of the *romances*. In the original they are written in the eight-syllable line, with trochaic feet, instead of the iambics usually employed by us. But the real difficulty is in the peculiarity of the measure,— the *asonante,* as it is called, in which the rhyme depends solely on the conformity of vowel sounds, without reference to the consonants, as in English verse. Thus the words *dedo, tiempo, viejos,* are all good *asonantes,* taken at random from one of these old ballads. An attempt has been made by more than one clever writer to transplant them into English verse. But it has had as little success as the attempt to naturalize the ancient hexameter, which neither the skill of Southey nor of Longfellow will, probably, be able to effect. The Spanish vowels have for the most part a clear and open sound, which renders the melody of the versification sufficiently sensible to the ear; while the

middle station which it occupies between the perfect rhyme and blank verse seems to fit it in an especial manner for these simple narrative compositions. The same qualities have recommended it to the dramatic writers of Spain as the best medium of poetical dialogue, and as such it is habitually used by the great masters of the national theatre.

No class of these popular compositions have greater interest than the Moorish *romances*, affording glimpses of a state of society in which the Oriental was strangely mingled with the European. Some of them may have been written by the Moriscoes after the fall of Granada. They are redolent of the beautiful land which gave them birth,—springing up like wild flowers amid the ruins of the fallen capital. Mr. Ticknor has touched lightly on these in comparison with some of the other varieties, perhaps because they have been more freely criticised by preceding writers. Every lover of good poetry is familiar with Mr. Lockhart's picturesque version of these ballads, which has every merit but that of fidelity to the original.

The production of the Spanish ballads is evidence of great sensibility in the nation; but it must also be referred to the exciting scenes in which it was engaged. A similar cause gave rise to the beautiful border minstrelsy of Scotland. But the adventures of robber chieftains and roving outlaws excite an interest of a very inferior order to that created by the great contest for religion and independence which gave rise to the Spanish

ballads. This gives an ennobling principle to these compositions which raises them far above the popular minstrelsy of every other country. It recommended them to the more polished writers of a later period, under whose hands, if they have lost something of their primitive simplicity, they have been made to form a delightful portion of the national literature. We cannot do better than to quote on this the eloquent remarks of our author:

"Ballads, in the seventeenth century, had become the delight of the whole Spanish people. The soldier solaced himself with them in his tent, and the muleteer amid the *sierras;* the maiden danced to them on the green, and the lover sang them for his serenade; they entered into the low orgies of thieves and vagabonds, into the sumptuous entertainments of the luxurious nobility, and into the holiday services of the Church; the blind beggar chanted them to gather alms, and the puppet-showman gave them in recitative to explain his exhibition; they were a part of the very foundation of the theatre, both secular and religious, and the theatre carried them everywhere, and added everywhere to their effect and authority. No poetry of modern times has been so widely spread through all classes of society, and none has so entered into the national character. The ballads, in fact, seem to have been found on every spot of Spanish soil. They seem to have filled the very air that men breathed."

The next of the great divisions of this long period is the Chronicles,—a fruitful theme, like the former, and still less explored. For much of this

literature is in rare books, or rarer manuscripts. There is no lack of materials, however, in the present work, and the whole ground is mapped out before us by a guide evidently familiar with all its intricacies.

The Spanish Chronicles are distributed into several classes, as those of a public and of a private nature, romantic chronicles, and those of travels. The work which may be said to lead the van of the long array is the "*Crónica General*" of Alfonso the Wise, written by this monarch probably somewhere about the middle of the thirteenth century. It covers a wide ground, from the creation to the time of the royal writer. The third book is devoted to the Cid, ever the representative of the heroic age of Castile. The fourth records the events of the monarch's own time. Alfonso's work is followed by the "Chronicle of the Cid," in which the events of the champion's life are now first detailed in sober prose.

There is much resemblance between large portions of these two chronicles. This circumstance has led to the conclusion that they both must have been indebted to a common source, or, as seems more probable, that the "Chronicle of the Cid" was taken from that of Alfonso. This latter opinion Mr. Ticknor sustains by internal evidence not easily answered. There seems no reason to doubt, however, that both one and the other were indebted to the popular ballads, and that these, in their turn, were often little more than a versification of the pages of Alfonso's Chronicle. Mr. Ticknor has traced out this curious process by bringing to-

gether the parallel passages, which are too numerous and nearly allied to leave any doubt on the matter.

Sepulveda, a scholar of the sixteenth century, has converted considerable fragments of the "General Chronicle" into verse, without great violence to the original,—a remarkable proof of the near affinity that exists between prose and poetry in Spain; a fact which goes far to explain the facility and astonishing fecundity of some of its popular poets. For the Spaniards, it was nearly as easy to extemporize in verse as in prose.

The example of Alfonso the Tenth was followed by his son, who appointed a chronicler to take charge of the events of his reign. This practice continued with later sovereigns, until the chronicle gradually rose to the pretensions of regular history; when historiographers, with fixed salaries, were appointed by the crowns of Castile and Aragon; giving rise to a more complete body of contemporary annals, from authentic public sources, than is to be found in any other country in Christendom.

Such a collection, beginning with the thirteenth century, is of high value, and would be of far higher were its writers gifted with any thing like a sound spirit of criticism. But superstition lay too closely at the bottom of the Castilian character to allow of this,—a superstition nourished by the strange circumstances of the nation, by the legends of the saints, by the miracles coined by the clergy in support of the good cause, by the very ballads of which we have been treating, which, mingling fact

with fable, threw a halo around both that made it difficult to distinguish the one from the other. So palpable to a modern age are many of these fictions in regard to the Cid that one ingenious critic doubts even the real existence of this personage. But this is a degree of skepticism which, as Mr. Ticknor finely remarks, "makes too great a demand on our credulity."

This superstition, too deeply seated to be eradicated, and so repugnant to a philosophical spirit of criticism, is the greatest blemish on the writings of the Castilian historians, even of the ripest age of scholarship, who show an appetite for the marvellous, and an easy faith, scarcely to be credited at the present day. But this is hardly a blemish with the older chronicles, and was suited to the twilight condition of the times. They are, indeed, a most interesting body of ancient literature, with all the freshness and chivalrous bearing of the age; with their long, rambling episodes, that lead to nothing; their childish fondness for pageants and knightly spectacles; their rough dialect, which, with the progress of time, working off the impurities of an unformed vocabulary, rose, in the reign of John the Second and of Ferdinand and Isabella, into passages of positive eloquence. But we cannot do better than give the concluding remarks of our author on this rich mine of literature, which he has now for the first time fully explored and turned up to the public gaze.

"As we close it up," he says,—speaking of an old chronicle he has been criticising,—"we should not forget that the whole series, extending over

full two hundred and fifty years, from the time of Alfonso the Wise to the accession of Charles the Fifth, and covering the New World as well as the Old, is unrivalled in richness, in variety, and in picturesque and poetical elements. In truth, the chronicles of no other nation can, on such points, be compared to them; not even the Portuguese, which approach the nearest in original and early materials; nor the French, which, in Joinville and Froissart, make the highest claims in another direction. For these old Spanish chronicles, whether they have their foundations in truth or in fable, always strike farther down than those of any other nation into the deep soil of the popular feeling and character. The old Spanish loyalty, the old Spanish religious faith, as both were formed and nourished in the long periods of national trial and suffering, are constantly coming out,—hardly less in Columbus and his followers, or even amid the atrocities of the conquests in the New World, than in the half-miraculous accounts of the battles of Hazinas and Tolosa, or in the grand and glorious drama of the fall of Granada. Indeed, wherever we go under their leading, whether to the court of Tamerlane or to that of Saint Ferdinand, we find the heroic elements of the national genius gathered around us; and thus, in this vast, rich mass of chronicles, containing such a body of antiquities, traditions, and fables as has been offered to no other people, we are constantly discovering not only the materials from which were drawn a multitude of the old Spanish ballads, plays, and romances, but a mine which has been

unceasingly wrought by the rest of Europe for similar purposes and still remains unexhausted."

We now come to the Romances of Chivalry, to which the transition is not difficult from the romantic chronicles we have been considering. It was, perhaps, the romantic character of these compositions, as well as of the popular minstrelsy of the country, which supplied the wants of the Spaniards in this way, and so long delayed the appearance of the true Romance of Chivalry.

Long before it was seen in Spain, this kind of writing had made its appearance, in prose and verse, in other lands, and the tales of Arthur and the Round Table, and of Charlemagne and his Peers, had beguiled the long evenings of our Norman ancestors, and of their brethren on the other side of the Channel. The first book of chivalry that was published in Spain even then was not indigenous, but translated from a Portuguese work, the Amadis de Gaula. But the Portuguese, according to the account of Mr. Ticknor, probably perished with the library of a nobleman, in the great earthquake at Lisbon, in 1755; so that Montalvan's Castilian translation, published in Queen Isabella's reign, now takes the place of the original. Of its merits as a translation who can speak ? Its merits as a work of imagination, and, considering the age, its literary execution, are of a high order.

An English version of the book appeared early in the present century, from the pen of Southey, to whom English literature is indebted for more than one valuable contribution of a similar kind. We well remember the delight with which, in our

early days, we pored over its fascinating pages, —the bright scenes in which we revelled of Oriental mythology, the beautiful portraiture which is held up of knightly courtesy in the person of Amadis, and the feminine loveliness of Oriana. It was an ideal world of beauty and magnificence, to which the Southern imagination had given a far warmer coloring than was to be found in the ruder conceptions of the Northern minstrel. At a later period, we have read—tried to read—the same story in the pages of Montalvan himself. But the age of chivalry was gone.

The "Amadis" touched the right spring in the Castilian bosom, and its popularity was great and immediate. Edition succeeded edition; and, what was worse, a swarm of other knight-errants soon came into the world, claiming kindred with the Amadis. But few of them bore any resemblance to their prototype, other than in their extravagance. Their merits were summarily settled by the worthy curate in "Don Quixote," who ordered most of them to the flames, declaring that the good qualities of Amadis should not cloak the sins of his posterity.

The tendency of these books was very mischievous. They fostered the spirit of exaggeration, both in language and sentiment, too natural to the Castilian. They debauched the taste of the reader, while the voluptuous images in which most of them indulged did no good to his morals. They encouraged, in fine, a wild spirit of knight-errantry, which seemed to emulate the extravagance of the tales themselves. Sober men wrote, preachers

declaimed, against them, but in vain. The Cortes of 1553 presented a petition to the crown that the publication of such works might be prohibited, as pernicious to society. Another petition of the same body, in 1555, insists on this still more strongly, and in terms that, coming as they do from so grave an assembly, can hardly be read at the present day without a smile. Mr. Ticknor notices both these legislative acts, in an extract which we shall give. But he omits the words of the petition of 1555, which dwells so piteously on the grievances of the nation, and which we will quote, as they may amuse the reader. "Moreover," says the instrument, "we say that it is very notorious what mischief has been done to young men and maidens, and other persons, by the perusal of books full of lies and vanities, like Amadis, and works of that description, since young people especially, from their natural idleness, resort to this kind of reading, and, becoming enamored of passages of love or arms, or other nonsense which they find set forth therein, when situations at all analogous offer, are led to act much more extravagantly than they otherwise would have done. And many times the daughter, when her mother has locked her up safely at home, amuses herself with reading these books, which do her more hurt than she would have received from going abroad. All which redounds not only to the dishonor of individuals, but to the great detriment of conscience, by diverting the affections from holy, true, and Christian doctrine, to those wicked vanities, with which the wits, as we have intimated, are com-

pletely bewildered. To remedy this, we entreat your majesty that no book treating of such matters be henceforth permitted to be read, that those now printed be collected and burned, and that none be published hereafter without special license; by which measures your majesty will render great service to God, as well as to these kingdoms," etc., etc.

But what neither the menaces of the pulpit nor the authority of the law could effect was brought about by the breath of ridicule,—

> "That soft and summer breath, whose subtile power
> Passes the strength of storms in their most desolate hour."

The fever was at its height when Cervantes sent his knight-errant into the world to combat the phantoms of chivalry; and at one touch of his lance they disappeared forever. From the day of the publication of the "Don Quixote," not a book of chivalry was ever written in Spain. There is no other such triumph recorded in the annals of genius.

We close these remarks with the following extract, which shows the condition of society in Castile under the influence of these romances:

"Spain, when the romances of chivalry first appeared, had long been peculiarly the land of knighthood. The Moorish wars, which had made every gentleman a soldier, necessarily tended to this result; and so did the free spirit of the communities, led on as they were, during the next period, by barons who long continued almost as independent in their castles as the king was on his

throne. Such a state of things, in fact, is to be recognized as far back as the thirteenth century, when the Partidas, by the most minute and painstaking legislation, provided for a condition of society not easily to be distinguished from that set forth in the Amadis or the Palmerin. The poem and history of the Cid bear witness yet earlier, indirectly indeed, but very strongly, to a similar state of the country; and so do many of the old ballads and other records of the national feelings and traditions that had come from the fourteenth century.

"But in the fifteenth the chronicles are full of it, and exhibit it in forms the most grave and imposing. Dangerous tournaments, in some of which the chief men of the time, and even the kings themselves, took part, occur constantly, and are recorded among the important events of the age. At the passage of arms near Orbigo, in the reign of John the Second, eighty knights, as we have seen, were found ready to risk their lives for as fantastic a fiction of gallantry as is recorded in any of the romances of chivalry; a folly of which this was by no means the only instance. Nor did they confine their extravagances to their own country. In the same reign, two Spanish knights went as far as Burgundy, professedly in search of adventures, which they strangely mingled with a pilgrimage to Jerusalem,—seeming to regard both as religious exercises. And as late as the time of Ferdinand and Isabella, Fernando del Pulgar, their wise secretary, gives us the names of several distinguished noblemen, personally

known to himself, who had gone into foreign countries 'in order,' as he says, 'to try the fortune of arms with any cavalier that might be pleased to adventure with them, and so gain honor for themselves, and the fame of valiant and bold knights for the gentlemen of Castile.'

"A state of society like this was the natural result of the extraordinary development which the institutions of chivalry had then received in Spain. Some of it was suited to the age, and salutary; the rest was knight-errantry, and knight-errantry in its wildest extravagance. When, however, the imaginations of men were so excited as to tolerate and maintain in their daily life such manners and institutions as these, they would not fail to enjoy the boldest and most free representations of a corresponding state of society in works of romantic fiction. But they went farther. Extravagant and even impossible as are many of the adventures recorded in the books of chivalry, they still seemed so little to exceed the absurdities frequently witnessed or told of known and living men, that many persons took the romances themselves to be true histories, and believed them. Thus, Mexia, the trustworthy historiographer of Charles the Fifth, says, in 1545, when speaking of 'the Amadises, Lisuartes, and Clarions,' that 'their authors do waste their time and weary their faculties in writing such books, which are read by all and believed by many. For,' he goes on, 'there be men who think all these things really happened, just as they read or hear them, though the greater part of the things themselves are sinful, profane, and

unbecoming.' And Castillo, another chronicler, tells us gravely, in 1587, that Philip the Second, when he married Mary of England, only forty years earlier promised that if King Arthur should return to claim the throne he would peaceably yield to that prince all his rights; thus implying, at least in Castillo himself, and probably in many of his readers a full faith in the stories of Arthur and his Round Table.

"Such credulity, it is true, now seems impossible, even if we suppose it was confined to a moderate number of intelligent persons; and hardly less so when, as in the admirable sketch of an easy faith in the stories of chivalry by the innkeeper and Maritornes in Don Quixote, we are shown that it extended to the mass of the people. But before we refuse our assent to the statements of such faithful chroniclers as Mexia, on the ground that what they relate is impossible, we should recollect that, in the age when they lived, men were in the habit of believing and asserting every day things no less incredible than those recited in the old romances. The Spanish Church then countenanced a trust in miracles as of constant recurrence, which required of those who believed them more credulity than the fictions of chivalry; and yet how few were found wanting in faith! And how few doubted the tales that had come down to them of the impossible achievements of their fathers during the seven centuries of their warfare against the Moors, or the glorious traditions of all sorts that still constitute the charm of their brave old chronicles, though we now see at a

glance that many of them are as fabulous as any thing told of Palmerin or Launcelot!

"But, whatever we may think of this belief in the romances of chivalry, there is no question that in Spain during the sixteenth century there prevailed a passion for them such as was never known elsewhere. The proof of it comes to us from all sides. The poetry of the country is full of it, from the romantic ballads that still live in the memory of the people, up to the old plays that have ceased to be acted and the old epics that have ceased to be read. The national manners and the national dress, more peculiar and picturesque than in other countries, long bore its sure impress. The old laws, too, speak no less plainly. Indeed, the passion for such fictions was so strong, and seemed so dangerous, that in 1553 they were prohibited from being printed, sold, or read in the American colonies; and in 1555 the Cortes earnestly asked that the same prohibition might be extended to Spain itself, and that all the extant copies of romances of chivalry might be publicly burned. And, finally, half a century later, the happiest work of the greatest genius Spain has produced bears witness on every page to the prevalence of an absolute fanaticism for books of chivalry, and becomes at once the seal of their vast popularity and the monument of their fate."

We can barely touch on the Drama, the last of the three great divisions into which our author has thrown this period. It is of little moment, for down to the close of the fifteenth century the Castilian drama afforded small promise of the

brilliant fortunes that awaited it. It was born under an Italian sky. Almost its first lispings were at the vice-regal court of Naples, and under a foreign influence it displayed few of the national characteristics which afterwards marked its career. Yet the germs of future excellence may be discerned in the compositions of Encina and Naharro; and the "Celestina," though not designed for the stage, had a literary merit that was acknowledged throughout Europe.

Mr. Ticknor, as usual, accompanies his analysis with occasional translations of the best passages from the ancient masters. From one of these—a sort of dramatic eclogue, by Gil Vicente—we extract the following spirited verses. The scene represents Cassandra, the heroine of the piece, as refusing all the solicitations of her family to change her state of maiden freedom for married life:

"They say, 'Tis time, go, marry! go!'
But I'll no husband! not I! no!
For I would live all carelessly,
Amid these hills, a maiden free,
And never ask, nor anxious be,
Of wedded weal or woe:
Yet still they say, 'Go, marry! go!'
But I'll no husband! not I! no!

"So, mother, think not I shall wed,
And through a tiresome life be led,
Or use in folly's ways instead
What grace the heavens bestow.
Yet still they say, 'Go, marry! go!'
But I'll no husband! not I! no!
The man has not been born, I ween,
Who as my husband shall be seen;
And since what frequent tricks have been
Undoubtingly I know,
In vain they say, 'Go, marry! go!'
For I'll no husband! not I! no!"

She escapes to the woods, and her kinsmen, after in vain striving to bring her back, come in dancing and singing as madly as herself:

"She is wild! she is wild!
Who shall speak to the child?
On the hills pass her hours,
As a shepherdess free;
She is fair as the flowers,
She is wild as the sea!
She is wild! she is wild!
Who shall speak to the child?"

During the course of the period we have been considering there runs another rich vein of literature, the beautiful Provençal,—those lays of love and chivalry poured forth by the Troubadours in the little court of Provence, and afterwards of Catalonia. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the voice of the minstrel was hardly heard in other parts of Europe, the northern shores of the Mediterranean, on either side of the Pyrenees, were alive with song. But it was the melody of a too early spring, to be soon silenced under the wintry breath of persecution.

Mr. Ticknor, who paid, while in Europe, much attention to the Romance dialects, has given a pleasing analysis of this early literature after it had fled from the storms of persecution to the south of Spain. But few will care to learn a language which locks up a literature that was rather one of a beautiful promise than performance,—that prematurely perished and left no sign. And yet it did leave some sign of its existence, in the influence it exerted both on Italian and Castilian poetry.

This was peculiarly displayed at the court of John the Second of Castile, who flourished towards the middle of the fifteenth century. That prince gathered around him a circle of wits and poets, several of them men of the highest rank; and the intellectual spirit thus exhibited shows like a bright streak in the dawn of that higher civilization which rose upon Castile in the beginning of the following century. In this literary circle King John himself was a prominent figure, correcting the verses of his loving subjects, and occasionally inditing some of his own. In the somewhat severe language of Mr. Ticknor, "he turned to letters to avoid the importunity of business, and to gratify a constitutional indolence." There was, it is true, something ridiculous in King John's most respectable tastes, reminding us of the character of his contemporary René of Anjou. But still it was something, in those rough times, to manifest a relish for intellectual pleasures; and it had its effect in weaning his turbulent nobility from the indulgence of their coarser appetites.

The same liberal tastes, with still better result, were shown by his daughter, the illustrious Isabella the Catholic. Not that any work of great pretensions for its poetical merits was then produced. The poetry of the age, indeed, was pretty generally infected with the meretricious conceits of the Provençal and the old Castilian verse. We must except from this reproach the "Coplas" of Jorge Manrique, which have found so worthy an interpreter in Mr. Longfellow, and which would do honor to any age. But the age of Isa-

bella was in Castile what that of Poggio was in Italy. Learned men were invited from abroad, and took up their residence at the court. Native scholars went abroad, and brought back the rich fruits of an education in the most renowned of the Italian universities. The result of this scholarship was the preparation of dictionaries, grammars, and various philological works, which gave laws to the language and subjected it to a classic standard. Printing was introduced, and, under the royal patronage, presses were put in active operation in various cities of the kingdom. Thus, although no great work was actually produced, a beneficent impulse was given to letters, which trained up the scholar and opened the way for the brilliant civilization of the reign of Charles the Fifth. Our author has not paid the tribute to the reign of Isabella to which, in our judgment, it is entitled even in a literary view. He has noticed with commendation the various efforts made in it to introduce a more liberal scholarship, but has by no means dwelt with the emphasis they deserve on the importance of the results.

With the glorious rule of Ferdinand and Isabella closes the long period from the middle of the twelfth to the beginning of the sixteenth century,—a period which, if we except Italy, has no rival in modern history for the richness, variety, and picturesque character of its literature. It is that portion of the literature which seems to come spontaneously like the vegetation of a virgin soil, that must lose something of its natural freshness and perfume when brought under a more elaborate

cultivation. It is that portion which is most thoroughly imbued with the national spirit, unaffected by foreign influences; and the student who would fully comprehend the genius of the Spaniards must turn to these pure and primitive sources of their literary culture.

We cannot do better than close with the remarks in which Mr. Ticknor briefly, but with his usual perspicuity, sums up the actual achievements of the period:

"Poetry, or at least the love of poetry, made progress with the great advancement of the nation under Ferdinand and Isabella; though the taste of the court in whatever regarded Spanish literature continued low and false. Other circumstances, too, favored the great and beneficial change that was everywhere becoming apparent. The language of Castile had already asserted its supremacy, and, with the old Castilian spirit and cultivation, it was spreading into Andalusia and Aragon, and planting itself amid the ruins of the Moorish power on the shores of the Mediterranean. Chronicle-writing was become frequent, and had begun to take the forms of regular history. The drama was advanced as far as the 'Celestina' in prose, and the more strictly scenic efforts of Torres Naharro in verse. Romance-writing was at the height of its success. And the old ballad spirit—the true foundation of Spanish poetry—had received a new impulse and richer materials from the contests in which all Christian Spain had borne a part amid the mountains of Granada, and from the wild tales of the feuds and adventures of rival

factions within the walls of that devoted city. Every thing, indeed, announced a decided movement in the literature of the nation, and almost every thing seemed to favor and facilitate it."

The second great division embraces the long interval between 1500 and 1700, occupied by the Austrian dynasty of Spain. It covers the golden age, as generally considered, of Castilian literature; that in which it submitted in some degree to the influences of the advancing European civilization, and which witnessed those great productions of genius that have had the widest reputation with foreigners,—the age of Cervantes, of Lope de Vega, and of Calderon. The condition of Spain itself was materially changed. Instead of being hemmed in by her mountain-barrier, she had extended her relations to every court in Europe, and established her empire in every quarter of the globe. Emerging from her retired and solitary condition, she now took the first rank among the states of Christendom. Her literature naturally took the impress of this change, but not to the extent—or, at least, not in the precise manner—it would have done if left to its natural and independent action. But, unhappily for the land, the great power of its monarchs was turned against their own people, and the people were assailed, moreover, through the very qualities which should have entitled them to forbearance from their masters. Practising on their loyalty, their princes trampled on their ancient institutions, and loyalty was degraded into an abject servility. The religious zeal of early days, which had carried them

triumphant through the Moorish struggle, turned, under the influence of the priests, into a sour fanaticism, which opened the way to the Inquisition,—the most terrible engine of oppression ever devised by man,—not so terrible for its operation on the body as on the mind. Under its baneful influence, literature lost its free and healthy action; and, however high its pretensions as a work of art, it becomes so degenerate in a moral aspect that it has far less to awaken our sympathies than the productions of an earlier time. From this circumstance, as well as from that of its being much better known to the generality of scholars, we shall pass only in rapid review some of its most remarkable persons and productions. Before entering on this field, we will quote some important observations of our author on the general prospects of the period he is to discuss. Thus to allow coming events to cast their shadows before, is better suited to the purposes of the literary historian than of the novelist. His remarks on the Inquisition are striking:

"The results of such extraordinary traits in the national character could not fail to be impressed upon the literature of any country, and particularly upon a literature which, like that of Spain, had always been strongly marked by the popular temperament and peculiarities. But the period was not one in which such traits could be produced with poetical effect. The ancient loyalty, which had once been so generous an element in the Spanish character and cultivation, was now infected with the ambition of universal empire, and was lavished upon princes and nobles who, like the

later Philips and their ministers, were unworthy of its homage: so that in the Spanish historians and epic poets of this period, and even in more popular writers, like Quevedo and Calderon, we find a vainglorious admiration of their country, and a poor flattery of royalty and rank, that reminds us of the old Castilian pride and deference only by showing how both had lost their dignity. And so it is with the ancient religious feeling that was so nearly akin to this loyalty. The Christian spirit, which gave an air of duty to the wildest forms of adventure throughout the country during its long contest with the power of misbelief, was now fallen away into a low and anxious bigotry, fierce and intolerant towards every thing that differed from its own sharply-defined faith, and yet so pervading and so popular that the romances and tales of the time are full of it, and the national theatre, in more than one form, becomes its strange and grotesque monument.

"Of course, the body of Spanish poetry and eloquent prose produced during this interval—the earlier part of which was the period of the greatest glory Spain ever enjoyed—was injuriously affected by so diseased a condition of the national character. That generous and manly spirit which is the breath of intellectual life to any people was restrained and stifled. Some departments of literature, such as forensic eloquence and eloquence of the pulpit, satirical poetry, and elegant didactic prose, hardly appeared at all; others, like epic poetry, were strangely perverted and misdirected; while yet others, like the drama, the

ballads, and the lighter forms of lyrical verse, seemed to grow exuberant and lawless, from the very restraints imposed on the rest,—restraints which, in fact, forced poetical genius into channels where it would otherwise have flowed much more scantily and with much less luxuriant results.

"The books that were published during the whole period on which we are now entering, and indeed for a century later, bore everywhere marks of the subjection to which the press and those who wrote for it were alike reduced. From the abject title-pages and dedications of the authors themselves, through the crowd of certificates collected from their friends to establish the orthodoxy of works that were often as little connected with religion as fairy-tales, down to the colophon, supplicating pardon for any unconscious neglect of the authority of the Church or any too free use of classical mythology, we are continually oppressed with painful proofs not only how completely the human mind was enslaved in Spain, but how grievously it had become cramped and crippled by the chains it had so long worn.

"But we shall be greatly in error if, as we notice these deep marks and strange peculiarities in Spanish literature, we suppose they were produced by the direct action either of the Inquisition or of the civil government of the country, compressing, as if with a physical power, the whole circle of society. This would have been impossible. No nation would have submitted to it; much less so high-spirited and chivalrous a nation as the Spanish in the reign of Charles the Fifth and in the greater

part of that of Philip the Second. This dark work was done earlier. Its foundations were laid deep and sure in the old Castilian character. It was the result of the excess and misdirection of that very Christian zeal which fought so fervently and gloriously against the intrusion of Mohammedanism into Europe, and of that military loyalty which sustained the Spanish princes so faithfully through the whole of that terrible contest; both of them high and ennobling principles, which in Spain were more wrought into the popular character than they ever were in any other country.

" Spanish submission to an unworthy despotism, and Spanish bigotry, were, therefore, not the results of the Inquisition and the modern appliances of a corrupting monarchy, but the Inquisition and the despotism were rather the results of a misdirection of the old religious faith and loyalty. The civilization that recognized such elements presented, no doubt, much that was brilliant, picturesque, and ennobling; but it was not without its darker side; for it failed to excite and cherish many of the most elevating qualities of our common nature,—those qualities which are produced in domestic life and result in the cultivation of the arts of peace.

" As we proceed, therefore, we shall find, in the full development of the Spanish character and literature, seeming contradictions, which can be reconciled only by looking back to the foundations on which they both rest. We shall find the Inquisition at the height of its power, and a free and immoral drama at the height of its popularity,—

Philip the Second and his two immediate successors governing the country with the severest and most jealous despotism, while Quevedo was writing his witty and dangerous satires, and Cervantes his genial and wise Don Quixote. But the more carefully we consider such a state of things, the more we shall see that these are moral contradictions which draw after them grave moral mischiefs. The Spanish nation and the men of genius who illustrated its best days might be light-hearted because they did not perceive the limits within which they were confined, or did not, for a time, feel the restraints that were imposed upon them. What they gave up might be given up with cheerful hearts, and not with a sense of discouragement and degradation; it might be done in the spirit of loyalty and with the fervor of religious zeal; but it is not at all the less true that the hard limits were there, and that great sacrifices of the best elements of the national character must follow.

"Of this, time gave abundant proof. Only a little more than a century elapsed before the government that had threatened the world with a universal empire was hardly able to repel invasion from abroad, or maintain the allegiance of its own subjects at home. Life—the vigorous, poetical life which had been kindled through the country in its ages of trial and adversity—was evidently passing out of the whole Spanish character. As a people they sunk away from being a first-rate power in Europe, till they became one of altogether inferior importance and consideration, and

then, drawing back haughtily behind their mountains, rejected all equal intercourse with the rest of the world, in a spirit almost as exclusive and intolerant as that in which they had formerly refused intercourse with their Arab conquerors. The crude and gross wealth poured in from their American possessions sustained, indeed, for yet another century the forms of a miserable political existence in their government; but the earnest faith, the loyalty, the dignity of the Spanish people were gone, and little remained in their place but a weak subserviency to the unworthy masters of the state, and a low, timid bigotry in whatever related to religion. The old enthusiasm, rarely directed by wisdom from the first, and often misdirected afterwards, faded away; and the poetry of the country, which had always depended more on the state of the popular feeling than any other poetry of modern times, faded and failed with it."

The first thing that strikes us, at the very commencement of this new period, is the attempt to subject the Castilian to Italian forms of versification. This attempt, through the perfect tact of Boscan and the delicate genius of Garcilasso, who rivalled in their own walks the greatest masters of Italian verse, was eminently successful. It would indeed be wonderful if the intimate relations now established between Spain and Italy did not lead to a reciprocal influence of their literatures on each other. The two languages, descended from the same parent stock, the Latin, were nearest of kin to each other,—in the relation, if we may so speak, of brother and sister. The Castilian, with its deep

Arabic gutturals, and its clear, sonorous sounds, had the masculine character, which assorted well with the more feminine graces of the Italian, with its musical cadences and soft vowel terminations. The transition from one language to the other was almost as natural as from the dialect of one province of a country to that of its neighbor.

The revolution thus effected went far below the surface of Spanish poetry. It is for this reason that we are satisfied that Mr. Ticknor has judged wisely, as we have before intimated, in arranging the division-lines of his two periods in such a manner as to throw into the former that primitive portion of the national literature which was untouched, at least to any considerable extent, by a foreign influence.

Yet in the compositions of this second period it must be admitted that by far the greater portion of what is really good rests on the original basis of the national character, though under the controlling influences of a riper age of civilization. And foremost of the great writers of this national school we find the author of "Don Quixote," whose fame seems now to belong to Europe as much as to the land that gave him birth. Mr. Ticknor has given a very interesting notice of the great writer and of his various compositions. The materials for this are, for the most part, not very difficult to be procured; for Cervantes is the author whom his countrymen, since his death, with a spirit very different from that of his contemporaries, have most delighted to honor. Fortunately, the Castilian romancer has supplied us with mater-

ials for his own biography, which remind us of the lamentable poverty under which we labor in all that relates to his contemporary, Shakspeare. In Mr. Ticknor's biographical notice the reader will find some details probably not familiar to him, and a careful discussion of those points over which still rests any cloud of uncertainty.

He inquires into the grounds of the imputation of an unworthy jealousy having existed between Lope and his illustrious rival, and we heartily concur with him in the general results of his investigation:

"Concerning his relations with Lope de Vega there has been much discussion to little purpose. Certain it is that Cervantes often praises this great literary idol of his age, and that four or five times Lope stoops from his pride of place and compliments Cervantes, though never beyond the measure of praise he bestows on many whose claims were greatly inferior. But in his stately flight it is plain that he soared much above the author of Don Quixote, to whose highest merits he seemed carefully to avoid all homage; and though I find no sufficient reason to suppose their relation to each other was marked by any personal jealousy or ill will, as has been sometimes supposed, yet I can find no proof that it was either intimate or kindly. On the contrary, when we consider the good nature of Cervantes, which made him praise to excess nearly all his other literary contemporaries, as well as the greatest of them all, and when we allow for the frequency of hyperbole in such praises at that time, which prevented them

from being what they would now be, we may perceive an occasional coolness in his manner, when he speaks of Lope, which shows that, without over-rating his own merits and claims, he was not insensible to the difference in their respective positions, or to the injustice towards himself implied by it. Indeed, his whole tone, whenever he notices Lope, seems to be marked with much personal dignity, and to be singularly honorable to him."

Mr. Ticknor in a note to the above, states that he has been able to find only five passages in all Lope de Vega's works where there is any mention of Cervantes, and not one of these written after the appearance of the "Don Quixote," during its author's lifetime,—a significant fact. One of the passages to which our author refers, and which is from the "Laurel de Apolo," contains, he says, "a somewhat stiff eulogy on Cervantes." We quote the original couplet, which alludes to the injury inflicted on Cervantes's hand in the great battle of Lepanto:

> "Porque se diga que una mano herida
> Pudo dar á su dueño eterna vida."

Which may be rendered,

> "The hand, though crippled in the glorious strife,
> Sufficed to gain its lord eternal life."

We imagine that most who read the distich—the Castilian, not the English—will be disposed to regard it as no inelegant, and certainly not a parsimonious, tribute from one bard to another,—at least, if made in the lifetime of the subject of it.

Unfortunately, it was not written till some fourteen years after the death of Cervantes, when he was beyond the power of being pleased or profited by praise from any quarter.

Mr. Ticknor closes the sketch of Cervantes with some pertinent and touching reflections on the circumstances under which his great work was composed:

"The romance which he threw so carelessly from him, and which, I am persuaded, he regarded rather as a bold effort to break up the absurd taste of his time for the fancies of chivalry than as any thing of more serious import, has been established by an uninterrupted, and,, it may be said, an unquestioned, success ever since, both as the oldest classical specimen of romantic fiction, and as one of the most remarkable monuments of modern genius. But, though this may be enough to fill the measure of human fame and glory, it is not all to which Cervantes is entitled; for, if we would do him the justice that would have been dearest to his own spirit, and even if we would ourselves fully comprehend and enjoy the whole of his Don Quixote, we should, as we read it, bear in mind that this delightful romance was not the result of a youthful exuberance of feeling and a happy external condition, nor composed in his best years, when the spirits of its author were light and his hopes high; but that—with all its unquenchable and irresistible humor, with its bright views of the world, and its cheerful trust in goodness and virtue—it was written in his old age, at the conclusion of a life nearly every step of which had been marked with

disappointed expectations, disheartening struggles, and sore calamities; that he began it in a prison, and that it was finished when he felt the hand of death pressing heavy and cold upon his heart. If this be remembered as we read, we may feel, as we ought to feel, what admiration and reverence are due not only to the living power of Don Quixote, but to the character and genius of Cervantes."

The next name that meets us in the volume is that of Lope de Vega Carpio, the idol of his generation, who lived, in all the enjoyment of wealth and worldly honors, in the same city, and, as some accounts state, in the same street, where his illustrious rival was pining in poverty and neglect. If posterity has reversed the judgment of their contemporaries, still we cannot withhold our admiration at the inexhaustible invention of Lope and the miraculous facility of his composition. His achievements in this way, perfectly well authenticated, are yet such as to stagger credibility. He wrote in all about eighteen hundred regular dramas, and four hundred autos,—pieces of one act each. Besides this, he composed, at leisure intervals, no less than twenty-one printed volumes of miscellaneous poetry, including eleven narrative and didactic poems of much length, in *ottava rima,* and seven hundred sonnets, also in the Italian measure. His comedies, amounting to between two and three thousand lines each, were mostly rhymed, and interspersed with ballads, sonnets, and different kinds of versification. Critics have sometimes amused themselves with com-

puting the amount of matter thus actually thrown off by him in the course of his dramatic career. The sum swells to twenty-one million three hundred thousand verses! He lived to the age of seventy-two, and if we allow him to have employed fifty years—which will not be far from the truth—in his theatrical compositions, it will give an average of something like a play a week, through the whole period, to say nothing of the epics and other miscellanies! He tells us, farther, that on one occasion he produced five entire plays in a fortnight. And his biographer assures us that more than once he turned off a whole drama in twenty-four hours. These plays, it will be recollected, with their stores of invention and fluent versification, were the delight of all classes of his countrymen, and the copious fountain of supply to half the theatres of Europe. Well might Cervantes call him the "*monstruo de naturaleza*,"—the "miracle of nature."

The vast popularity of Lope, and the unprecedented amount of his labors, brought with them, as might be expected, a substantial recompense. This remuneration was of the most honorable kind, for it was chiefly derived from the public. It is said to have amounted to no less than a hundred thousand ducats,*—which, estimating the ducat at its probable value of six or seven dollars of our day, has no parallel—or perhaps not more than one—upon record.

Yet Lope did not refuse the patronage of the great. From the Duke of Sessa he is said to have

* Sir Walter Scott's pen must have netted him more.—M.

received, in the course of his life, more than twenty thousand ducats. Another of his noble patrons was the Duke of Alva; not the terrible Duke of the Netherlands, but his grandson,—a man of some literary pretensions, hardly claimed for his great ancestor. Yet with the latter he has been constantly confounded, by Lord Holland, in his life of the poet, by Southey, after an examination of the matter, and lastly, though with some distrust, by Nicholas Antonio, the learned Castilian biographer. Mr. Ticknor shows beyond a doubt, from a critical examination of the subject, that they are all in error. The inquiry and the result are clearly stated in the notes, and are one among the many evidences which these notes afford of the minute and very accurate researches of our author into matters of historical interest that have baffled even the Castilian scholars.

We remember meeting with something of a similar blunder in Schlegel's Dramatic Lectures, where he speaks of the poet Garcilasso de la Vega as descended from the Peruvian Incas, and as having lost his life before Tunis. The fact is that the poet died at Nice, and that, too, some years before the birth of the Inca Garcilasso, with whom Schlegel so strangely confounds him. One should be charitable to such errors,—though a dogmatic critic like Schlegel has as little right as any to demand such charity,—for we well know how difficult it is always to escape them, when, as in Castile, the same name seems to descend, as an heir-loom, from one generation to another, if it be not, indeed, shared by more than one of the same

generation. In the case of the Duke of Alva there was not even this apology.

Mr. Ticknor has traced the personal history of Lope de Vega, so as to form a running commentary on his literary. It will be read with satisfaction even by those who are familiar with Lord Holland's agreeable life of the poet, since the publication of which more ample researches have been made into the condition of the Castilian drama. Those who are disposed to set too high a value on the advantages of literary success may learn a lesson by seeing how ineffectual it was to secure the happiness of that spoiled child of fortune. We give our author's account of his latter days, when his mind had become infected with the religious gloom which has too often settled round the evening of life with the fanatical Spaniard:

"But, as his life drew to a close, his religious feelings, mingled with a melancholy fanaticism, predominated more and more. Much of his poetry composed at this time expressed them; and at last they rose to such a height that he was almost constantly in a state of excited melancholy, or, as it was then beginning to be called, of hypochondria. Early in the month of August he felt himself extremely weak, and suffered more than ever from that sense of discouragement which was breaking down his resources and strength. His thoughts, however, were so exclusively occupied with his spiritual condition that, even when thus reduced, he continued to fast, and on one occasion went through with a private discipline so cruel that the walls of the apartment where it occurred were

afterwards found sprinkled with his blood. From this he never recovered. He was taken ill the same night; and, after fulfilling the offices prescribed by his Church with the most submissive devotion,—mourning that he had ever been engaged in any occupations but such as were exclusively religious,—he died on the 25th of August, 1635, nearly seventy-three years old.

"The sensation produced by his death was such as is rarely witnessed even in the case of those upon whom depends the welfare of nations. The Duke of Sessa, who was his especial patron, and to whom he left his manuscripts, provided for the funeral in a manner becoming his own wealth and rank. It lasted nine days. The crowds that thronged to it were immense. Three bishops officiated, and the first nobles of the land attended as mourners. Eulogies and poems followed on all sides, and in numbers all but incredible. Those written in Spain make one considerable volume, and end with a drama in which his apotheosis was brought upon the public stage. Those written in Italy are hardly less numerous, and fill another. But more touching than any of them was the prayer of that much-loved daughter, who had been shut up from the world fourteen years, that the long funeral procession might pass by her convent and permit her once more to look on the face she so tenderly venerated; and more solemn than any was the mourning of the multitude, from whose dense mass audible sobs burst forth as his remains slowly descended from their sight into the house appointed for all living."

Mr. Ticknor follows up his biographical sketch of Lope with an analysis of his plays, concluding the whole with a masterly review of his qualities as a dramatic writer. The discussion has a wider import than at first appears. For Lope de Vega, although he built on the foundations of the ancient drama, yet did this in such a manner as to settle the forms of this department of literature forever for his countrymen.

It would be interesting to compare the great Spanish dramatist with Shakspeare, who flourished at the same period, and who, in like manner, stamped his own character on the national theatre. Both drew their fictions from every source indiscriminately, and neither paid regard to probabilities of chronology, geography, or scarcely history. Time, place, and circumstance were of little moment in their eyes. Both built their dramas on the romantic model, with its magic scenes of joy and sorrow, in the display of which each was master in his own way; though the English poet could raise the tone of sentiment to a moral grandeur which the Castilian, with all the tragic coloring of his pencil, could never reach. Both fascinated their audiences by that sweet and natural flow of language, that seemed to set itself to music as it was uttered. But, however much alike in other points, there was one distinguishing feature in each, which removed them and their dramas far as the poles asunder.

Shakspeare's great object was the exhibition of character. To this every thing was directed. Situation, dialogue, story,—all were employed only to

this great end. This was in perfect accordance with the taste of his nation, as shown through the whole of its literature, from Chaucer to Scott. Lope de Vega, on the other hand, made so little account of character that he reproduces the same leading personages, in his different plays, over and over again, as if they had been all cast in the same mould. The *galan,* the *dama,* the *gracioso,* or buffoon, recur as regularly as the clown in the old English comedy, and their *rôle* is even more precisely defined.

The paramount object with Lope was the intrigue,—the story. His plays were, what Mr. Ticknor well styles them, dramatic novels. And this, as our author remarks, was perfectly conformable to the prevalent spirit of Spanish literature,—clearly narrative,—as shown in its long epics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, its host of ballads, its gossiping chronicles, its chivalrous romances. The great purpose of Lope was to excite and maintain an interest in the story. "Keep the *dénouement* in suspense," he says: "if it be once surmised, your audience will turn their backs on you." He frequently complicates his intrigues in such a manner that only the closest attention can follow them. He cautions his hearers to give this attention, especially at the outset.

Lope, with great tact, accommodated his theatre to the prevailing taste of his countrymen. "Plautus and Terence," he says, "I throw into the fire when I begin to write;" thus showing that it was not by accident but on a settled principle that he

arranged the forms of his dramas. It is the favorite principle of modern economists, that of consulting the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Lope did so, and was rewarded for it not merely by the applause of the million, but by that of every Spaniard, high and low, in the country. In all this, Lope de Vega acted on strictly philosophical principles. He conformed to the romantic, although the distinction was not then properly understood; and he thought it necessary to defend his departure from the rules of the ancients. But, in truth, such rules were not suited to the genius and usages of the Spaniards, any more than of the English; and more than one experiment proved that they would be as little tolerated by the one people as the other.

It is remarkable that the Spaniards, whose language rests so broadly on the Latin, in the same manner as with the French and the Italians, should have refused to rest their literature, like them, on the classic models of antiquity, and have chosen to conform to the romantic spirit of the more northern nations of the Teutonic family. It was the paramount influence of the Gothic element in their character, co-operating with the peculiar and most stimulating influences of their early history.

We close our remarks on Lope de Vega with some excellent reflections of our author on the rapidity of his composition, and showing to what extent his genius was reverenced by his contemporaries:

"Lope de Vega's immediate success, as we have seen, was in proportion to his rare powers and

favorable opportunities. For a long time nobody else was willingly heard on the stage; and during the whole of the forty or fifty years that he wrote for it, he stood quite unapproached in general popularity. His unnumbered plays and farces, in all the forms that were demanded by the fashions of the age or permitted by religious authority, filled the theatres both of the capital and the provinces; and so extraordinary was the impulse he gave to dramatic representations that, though there were only two companies of strolling players at Madrid when he began, there were about the period of his death no less than forty, comprehending nearly a thousand persons.

"Abroad, too, his fame was hardly less remarkable. In Rome, Naples, and Milan his dramas were performed in their original language; in France and Italy his name was announced in order to fill the theatres when no play of his was to be performed; and once even, and probably oftener, one of his dramas was represented in the seraglio at Constantinople. But perhaps neither all this popularity, nor yet the crowds that followed him in the streets and gathered in the balconies to watch him as he passed along, nor the name of Lope, that was given to whatever was esteemed singularly good in its kind, is so striking a proof of his dramatic success as the fact, so often complained of by himself and his friends, that multitudes of his plays were fraudulently noted down as they were acted, and then printed for profit throughout Spain, and that multitudes of other plays appeared under his name, and were

represented all over the provinces, that he had never heard of till they were published and performed.

"A large income naturally followed such popularity, for his plays were liberally paid for by the actors; and he had patrons of a munificence unknown in our days, and always undesirable. But he was thriftless and wasteful, exceedingly charitable, and, in hospitality to his friends, prodigal. He was, therefore, almost always embarrassed. At the end of his 'Jerusalem,' printed as early as 1609, he complains of the pressure of his domestic affairs; and in his old age he addressed some verses, in the nature of a petition, to the still more thriftless Philip the Fourth, asking the means of living for himself and daughter. After his death, his poverty was fully admitted by his executor; and yet, considering the relative value of money, no poet, perhaps, ever received so large a compensation for his works.

"It should, however, be remembered that no other poet ever wrote so much with popular effect. For, if we begin with his dramatic compositions, which are the best of his efforts, and go down to his epics, which, on the whole, are the worst, we shall find the amount of what was received with favor, as it came from the press, quite unparalleled. And when to this we are compelled to add his own assurance, just before his death, that the greater part of his works still remained in manuscript, we pause in astonishment, and, before we are able to believe the account, demand some explanation that will make it credible,—an ex-

planation which is the more important because it is the key to much of his personal character, as well as of his poetical success. And it is this. No poet of any considerable reputation ever had a genius so nearly related to that of an improvisator, or ever indulged his genius so freely in the spirit of improvisation. This talent has always existed in the southern countries of Europe, and in Spain has, from the first, produced, in different ways, the most extraordinary results. We owe to it the invention and perfection of the old ballads, which were originally improvisated and then preserved by tradition; and we owe to it the *seguidillas*, the *boleros*, and all the other forms of popular poetry that still exist in Spain, and are daily poured forth by the fervent imaginations of the uncultivated classes of the people, and sung to the national music, that sometimes seems to fill the air by night as the light of the sun does by day.

"In the time of Lope de Vega the passion for such improvisation had risen higher than it ever rose before, if it had not spread out more widely. Actors were expected sometimes to improvisate on themes given to them by the audience. Extemporaneous dramas, with all the varieties of verse demanded by the taste formed in the theatres, were not of rare occurrence. Philip the Fourth, Lope's patron, had such performed in his presence, and bore a part in them himself. And the famous Count de Lemos, the viceroy of Naples, to whom Cervantes was indebted for so much kindness, kept, as an *apanage* to his viceroyalty, a poetical court, of which the two Argensolas were

the chief ornaments, and in which extemporaneous plays were acted with brilliant success.

"Lope de Vega's talent was undoubtedly of near kindred to this genius of improvisation, and produced its extraordinary results by a similar process and in the same spirit. He dictated verse, we are told, with ease, more rapidly than an amanuensis could take it down; and wrote out an entire play in two days which could with difficulty be transcribed by a copyist in the same time. He was not absolutely an improvisator, for his education and position naturally led him to devote himself to written composition; but he was continually on the borders of whatever belongs to an improvisator's peculiar province,—was continually showing, in his merits and defects, in his ease, grace, and sudden resource, in his wildness and extravagance, in the happiness of his versification and the prodigal abundance of his imagery, that a very little more freedom, a very little more indulgence given to his feelings and his fancy, would have made him at once and entirely, not only an improvisator, but the most remarkable one that ever lived."

We pass over the long array of dramatic writers who trod closely in the footsteps of their great master, as well as a lively notice of the satirist Quevedo, and come at once to Calderon de la Barca, the great poet who divided with Lope the empire of the Spanish stage.

Our author has given a full biography of this famous dramatist, to which we must refer the reader; and we know of no other history in English

where he can meet with it at all. Calderon lived in the reign of Philip the Fourth, which, extending from 1621 to 1665, comprehends the most flourishing period of the Castilian theatre. The elegant tastes of the monarch, with his gay and gracious manners, formed a contrast to the austere temper of the other princes of the house of Austria. He was not only the patron of the drama, but a professor of the dramatic art, and, indeed, a performer. He wrote plays himself, and acted them in his own palace. His nobles, following his example, turned their saloons into theatres; and the great towns, and many of the smaller ones, partaking of the enthusiasm of the court, had their own theatres and companies of actors, which altogether amounted, at one time, to no less than three hundred. One may understand that it required no small amount of material to keep such a vast machinery in motion.

At the head of this mighty apparatus was the poet Calderon, the favorite of the court even more than Lope de Vega, but not more than he the favorite of the nation. He was fully entitled to this high distinction, if we are to receive half that is said of him by the German critics, among whom Schlegel particularly celebrates him as displaying the purest model of the romantic ideal, the most perfect development of the sentiments of love, heroism, and religious devotion. This exaggerated tone of eulogy calls forth the rebuke of Sismondi, who was educated in a different school of criticism, and whose historical pursuits led him to look below the surface of things to their moral

tendencies. By this standard Calderon has failed. And yet it seems to be a just standard, even when criticising a work by the rules of art; for a disregard of the obvious laws of morality is a violation of the principles of taste, on which the beautiful must rest. Not that Calderon's plays are chargeable with licentiousness or indecency to a greater extent than was common in the writers of the period. But they show a lamentable confusion of ideas in regard to the first principles of morality, by entirely confounding the creed of the individual with his religion. A conformity to the established creed is virtue, the departure from it vice. It is impossible to conceive, without reading his performances, to what revolting consequences this confusion of the moral perceptions perpetually leads.

Yet Calderon should not incur the reproach of hypocrisy, but that of fanaticism. He was the very dupe of superstition; and the spirit of fanaticism he shares with the greater part of his countrymen—even the most enlightened—of that period. Hypocrisy may have been the sin of the Puritan, but fanaticism was the sin of the Catholic Spaniard of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The one quality may be thought to reflect more discredit on the heart, the other on the head. The philosopher may speculate on their comparative moral turpitude; but the pages of history show that fanaticism armed with power has been the most fruitful parent of misery to mankind.

Calderon's drama turns on the most exaggerated principles of honor, jealousy, and revenge,

mingled with the highest religious exaltation. Some of these sentiments, usually referred to the influence of the Arabs, Mr. Ticknor traces to the ancient Gothic laws, which formed the basis of the early Spanish jurisprudence. The passages he cites are pertinent, and his theory is plausible; yet in the relations with woman we suspect much must still be allowed for the long contact with the jealous Arabian.

Calderon's characters and sentiments are formed for the most part on a purely ideal standard. The incidents of his plots are even more startling than those of Lope de Vega, more monstrous than the fictions of Dumas or Eugène Sue. But his thoughts are breathed forth in the intoxicating language of passion, with all the glowing imagery of the East, and in tones of the richest melody of which the Castilian tongue is capable.

Mr. Ticknor has enlivened his analysis of Calderon's drama with several translations, as usual, from which we should be glad to extract, but must content ourselves with the concluding portion of his criticism, where he sums up the prominent qualities of the bard:

"Calderon neither effected nor attempted any great changes in the forms of the drama. Two or three times, indeed, he prepared dramas that were either wholly sung, or partly sung and partly spoken; but even these, in their structure, were no more operas than his other plays, and were only a courtly luxury, which it was attempted to introduce, in imitation of the genuine opera just brought into France by Louis the Fourteenth, with

whose court that of Spain was now intimately connected. But this was all. Calderon has added to the stage no new form of dramatic composition. Nor has he much modified those forms which had been already arranged and settled by Lope de Vega. But he has shown more technical exactness in combining his incidents, and arranged every thing more skilfully for stage effect. He has given to the whole a new coloring, and, in some respects, a new physiognomy. His drama is more poetical in its tone and tendencies, and has less the air of truth and reality, than that of his great predecessor. In its more successful portions—which are rarely objectionable from their moral tone—it seems almost as if we were transported to another and more gorgeous world, where the scenery is lighted up with unknown and preternatural splendor, and where the motives and passions of the personages that pass before us are so highly wrought that we must have our own feelings not a little stirred and excited before we can take an earnest interest in what we witness or sympathize in its results. But even in this he is successful. The buoyancy of life and spirit that he has infused into the gayer divisions of his drama, and the moving tenderness that pervades its graver and more tragical portions, lift us unconsciously to the height where alone his brilliant exhibitions can prevail with our imaginations,—where alone we can be interested and deluded when we find ourselves in the midst not only of such a confusion of the different forms of the drama, but of such a confusion of the proper limits of dramatic and lyrical poetry.

"To this elevated tone, and to the constant effort necessary in order to sustain it, we owe much of what distinguishes Calderon from his predecessors, and nearly all that is most individual and characteristic in his separate merits and defects. It makes him less easy, graceful, and natural than Lope. It imparts to his style a mannerism which, notwithstanding the marvellous richness and fluency of his versification, sometimes wearies and sometimes offends us. It leads him to repeat from himself till many of his personages become standing characters, and his heroes and their servants, his ladies and their confidants, his old men and his buffoons, seem to be produced, like the masked figures of the ancient theatre, to represent, with the same attributes and in the same costume, the different intrigues of his various plots. It leads him, in short, to regard the whole of the Spanish drama as a form, within whose limits his imagination may be indulged without restraint, and in which Greeks and Romans, heathen divinities, and the supernatural fictions of Christian tradition, may be all brought out in Spanish fashions and with Spanish feelings, and led, through a succession of ingenious and interesting adventures, to the catastrophes their stories happen to require.

"In carrying out this theory of the Spanish drama, Calderon, as we have seen, often succeeds, and often fails. But when he succeeds, his success is sometimes of no common character. He then sets before us only models of ideal beauty, perfection, and splendor,—a world, he would have it, into which nothing should enter but the highest ele-

ments of the national genius. There, the fervid yet grave enthusiasm of the old Castilian heroism, the chivalrous adventures of modern, courtly honor, the generous self-devotion of individual loyalty, and that reserved but passionate love which, in a state of society where it was so rigorously withdrawn from notice, became a kind of unacknowledged religion of the heart, all seem to find their appropriate home. And when he has once brought us into this land of enchantment, whose glowing impossibilities his own genius has created, and has called around him forms of such grace and loveliness as those of Clara and Doña Angela, or heroic forms like those of Tuzani, Mariamne, and Don Ferdinand, then he has reached the highest point he ever attained, or ever proposed to himself; he has set before us the grand show of an idealized drama, resting on the purest and noblest elements of the Spanish national character, and one which, with all its unquestionable defects, is to be placed among the extraordinary phenomena of modern poetry."

We shall not attempt to follow down the long file of dramatic writers who occupy the remainder of the period. Their name is legion; and we are filled with admiration as we reflect on the intrepid diligence with which our author has waded through this amount of matter, and the fidelity with which he has rendered to the respective writers literary justice. We regret, however, that we have not space to select, as we had intended, some part of his lively account of the Spanish players, and of the condition of the stage. It is collected from

various obscure sources, and contains many curious particulars. They show that the Spanish theatre was conducted in a manner so dissimilar from what exists in other European nations as perfectly to vindicate its claims to originality.

It must not be supposed that the drama, though the great national diversion, was allowed to go on in Spain, any more than in other countries, in an uninterrupted flow of prosperity. It met with considerable opposition more than once in its career; and, on the representations of the clergy, at the close of Philip the Second's reign, performances were wholly interdicted, on the ground of their licentiousness. For two years the theatre was closed. But on the death of that gloomy monarch the drama, in obedience to the public voice, was renewed in greater splendor than before. It was urged by its friends that the theatre was required to pay a portion of its proceeds to certain charitable institutions, and this made all its performances in some sort an exercise of charity. Lope de Vega also showed his address by his *Comedias de Santos,* under which pious name the life of some saint or holy man was portrayed, which, however edifying in its close, afforded, too often, as great a display of profligacy in its earlier portions as is to be found in any of the secular plays of the *capa y espada.* His experiment seems to have satisfied the consciences of the opponents of the drama, or at least to have silenced their opposition. It reminds us of the manner in which some among us, who seem to have regarded the theatre with the antipathy entertained by our Puritan fathers,

have found their scruples vanish at witnessing these exhibitions under the more reputable names of "Athenæum," "Museum," or "Lyceum."

Our author has paid due attention to the other varieties of elegant literature which occupy this prolific period. We can barely enumerate the titles. Epic poetry has not secured to itself the same rank in Castile as in many other countries. At the head stands the "Araucana" of Ercilla, which Voltaire appears to have preferred to "Paradise Lost!" Yet it is little more than a chronicle done in rhyme; and, notwithstanding certain passages of energy and poetic eloquence, it is of more value as the historical record of an eye-witness than as a work of literary art.

In Pastoral poetry the Spaniards have better specimens. But they are specimens of an insipid kind of writing, notwithstanding it has found favor with the Italians, to whom it was introduced by a Spaniard,—a Spaniard in descent,—the celebrated author of the "Arcadia."

In the higher walks of Lyrical composition they have been more distinguished. The poetry of Herrera, in particular, seems to equal, in its dithyrambic flow, the best models of classic antiquity; while the muse of Luis de Leon is filled with the genuine inspiration of Christianity. Mr. Ticknor has given a pleasing portrait of this gentle enthusiast, whose life was consecrated to Heaven, and who preserved a tranquillity of temper unruffled by all the trials of an unmerited persecution.

We cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of quoting a translation of one of his odes, as the last

extract from our author. The subject is, the feelings of the disciples on witnessing the ascension of their Master:

"And dost thou, holy Shepherd, leave
Thine unprotected flock alone,
Here, in this darksome vale, to grieve,
While thou ascend'st thy glorious throne?

"Oh, where can they their hopes now turn,
Who never lived but on thy love?
Where rest the hearts for thee that burn,
When thou art lost in light above?

"How shall those eyes now find repose
That turn, in vain, thy smile to see?
What can they hear save mortal woes,
Who lose thy voice's melody?

"And who shall lay his tranquil hand
Upon the troubled ocean's might?
Who hush the wind by his command?
Who guide us through this starless night?

"For THOU art gone!—that cloud so bright,
That bears thee from our love away,
Springs upward through the dazzling light,
And leaves us here to weep and pray!"

A peculiar branch of Castilian literature is its Proverbs; those extracts of the popular wisdom, —"short sentences from long experience," as Cervantes publicly styles them. They have been gathered, more than once, in Spain, into printed collections. One of these, in the last century, contains no less than twenty-four thousand of these sayings! And a large number was still left floating among the people. It is evidence of extraordinary sagacity in the nation that its humblest classes should have made such a contribution to its literature. They have an additional value with purists

for their idiomatic richness of expression,—like the *riboboli* of the Florentine mob, which the Tuscan critics hold in veneration as the racy runnings from the dregs of the people. These popular maxims may be rather compared to the copper coin of the country, which has the widest circulation of any, and bears the true stamp of antiquity, —not adulterated, as is too often the case with the finer metals.

The last department we shall notice is that of the Spanish Tales,—rich, various, and highly picturesque. One class—the *picaresco* tales—are those with which the world has become familiar in the specimens afforded by the "Gil Blas" of Le Sage, an imitation—a rare occurrence—surpassing the original. This amusing class of fictions has found peculiar favor with the Spaniards, from its lively sketches of character, and the contrast it delights to present of the pride and the poverty of the *hidalgo*. Yet this kind of satirical fiction was invented by a man of rank, and one of the proudest of his order.

Our remarks have swelled to a much greater compass than we had intended, owing to the importance of the work before us, and the abundance of the topics, little familiar to the English reader. We have no room, therefore, for farther discussion of this second period, so fruitful in great names, and pass over, though reluctantly, our author's criticism on the historical writings of the age, in which he has penetrated below the surface of their literary forms to the scientific principles on which they were constructed.

Neither can we pause on the last of the three great periods into which our author has distributed the work, and which extends from the accession of the Bourbon dynasty in 1700 to some way into the present century. The omission is of the less consequence, from the lamentable decline of the literature, owing to the influence of French models, as well as to the political decline of the nation under the last princes of the Austrian dynasty. The circumstances which opened the way both to this social and literary degeneracy are well portrayed by Mr. Ticknor, and his account will be read with profit by the student of history.

We regret still more that we can but barely allude to the Appendix, which, in the eye of the Spanish critic, will form not the least important portion of the work. Besides several long poems, highly curious for their illustration of the ancient literature, now for the first time printed from the original manuscripts, we have, at the outset, a discussion of the origin and formation of the Castilian tongue, a truly valuable philological contribution. The subject has too little general attraction to allow its appearance in the body of the text; but those students who would obtain a thorough knowledge of the Castilian and the elements of which it is compounded will do well to begin the perusal of the work with this elaborate essay.

Neither have we room to say any thing of our author's inquiry into the genuineness of two works which have much engaged the attention of Castilian scholars, and both of which he pronounces apocryphal. The manner in which the inquiry is

conducted affords a fine specimen of literary criticism. In one of these discussions occurs a fact worthy of note. An ecclesiastic named Barrientos, of John the Second's court, has been accused of delivering to the flames, on the charge of necromancy, the library of a scholar then lately deceased, the famous Marquis of Villena. The good bishop, from his own time to the present, has suffered under this grievous imputation, which ranks him with Omar. Mr. Ticknor now cites a manuscript letter of the bishop himself, distinctly explaining that it was by the royal command that this literary *auto da fé* was celebrated. This incident is one proof among many of the rare character of our author's materials and of the careful study which he has given to them.

Spanish literature has been until now less thoroughly explored than the literature of almost any other European nation. Everybody has read "Gil Blas," and, through this foreign source, has got a good idea of the social condition of Spain at the period to which it belongs; and the social condition of that country is slower to change than that of any other country. Everybody has read "Don Quixote," and thus formed, or been able to form, some estimate of the high value of the Castilian literature. Yet the world, for the most part, seems to be content to take Montesquieu's witticism for truth,—that "the Spaniards have produced one good book, and the object of that was to laugh at all the rest." All, however, have not been so ignorant; and more than one cunning adventurer has found his way into the pleasant

field of Castilian letters and carried off materials of no little value for the composition of his own works. Such was Le Sage, as shown in more than one of his productions; such, too, were various of the dramatic writers of France and other countries, where the extent of the plunder can only be estimated by those who have themselves delved in the rich mines of Spanish lore.

Mr. Ticknor has now, for the first time, fully surveyed the ground, systematically arranged its various productions, and explored their character and properties. In the disposition of his immense mass of materials he has maintained the most perfect order, so distributing them as to afford every facility for the comprehension of the student.

We are everywhere made conscious of the abundance not merely of these materials—though one-third of the subjects brought under review, at least, are new to the public—but of the writer's intellectual resources. We feel that we are supplied from a reservoir that has been filled to overflowing from the very fountains of the Muses, which is, moreover, fed from other sources than those of the Castilian literature. By his critical acquaintance with the literatures of other nations, Mr. Ticknor has all the means at command for illustration and comparison. The extent of this various knowledge may be gathered from his notes, even more than from the text. A single glance at these will show on how broad a foundation the narrative rests. They contain stores of personal anecdote, criticism, and literary specula-

tion that might almost furnish materials for another work like the present.

Mr. Ticknor's History is conducted in a truly philosophical spirit. Instead of presenting a barren record of books,—which, like the catalogue of a gallery of paintings, is of comparatively little use to those who have not previously studied them,—he illustrates the works by the personal history of their authors, and this, again, by the history of the times in which they lived; affording, by the reciprocal action of one on the other, a complete record of Spanish civilization, both social and intellectual. It would be difficult to find a work more thoroughly penetrated with the true Castilian spirit, or to which the general student, or the student of civil history, may refer with no less advantage than one who is simply interested in the progress of letters. A pertinent example of this is in the account of Columbus, which contains passages from the correspondence of that remarkable man, which, even after all that has been written on the subject,—and so well written,—throw important light on his character.

The tone of criticism in these volumes is temperate and candid. We cannot but think Mr. Ticknor has profited largely by the former discussion of this subject in his academic lectures. Not that the present book bears much resemblance to those lectures,—certainly not more than must necessarily occur in the discussion of the same subject by the same mind, after a long interval of time. But this interval has enabled him to review, and no doubt in some cases to reverse, his earlier

judgments, and his present decisions come before us as the ripe results of a long and patient meditation. This gives them still higher authority.

We cannot conclude without some notice of the style, so essential an element in a work of elegant literature. It is clear, classical, and correct, with a sustained moral dignity that not unfrequently rises to eloquence. But it is usually distinguished by a calm philosophical tenor that is well suited to the character of the subject. It is especially free from any tendency to mysticism,—from vagueness of expression,—a pretty sure indication of vague conceptions in the mind of the author, which he is apt to dignify with the name of philosophy.

In our criticism on Mr. Ticknor's labors, we may be thought to have dwelt too exclusively on his merits. It may be that we owe something to the contagion of his own generous and genial tone of criticism on others. Or it may be that we feel more than common interest in a subject which is not altogether new to us; and it is only an acquaintance with the subject that can enable one to estimate the difficulties of its execution. Where we have had occasion to differ from our author, we have freely stated it. But such instances are few and of no great moment. We consider the work as one that does honor to English literature. It cannot fail to attract much attention from European critics who are at all instructed in the topics which it discusses. We predict with confidence that it will be speedily translated into Castilian and into German, and that it must become the standard work on Spanish literature, not only

for those who speak our own tongue, but for the Spaniards themselves.*

We have still a word to add on the typographical execution of the book, not in reference to its mechanical beauty, which is equal to that of any other that has come from the Cambridge press, but in regard to its verbal accuracy. This is not an easy matter in a work like the present, involving such an amount of references in foreign languages, as well as the publication of poems of considerable length from manuscript, and that, too, in the Castilian. We doubt if any similar work of erudition has been executed by a foreign press with greater accuracy. We do not doubt that it would not have been so well executed, in this respect, by any other press in this country.

* Prescott's prophecy has been more than fulfilled. Ticknor's History has been translated into Spanish, German and *French* and is still the standard work in Spain.—M.

THE END.

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

NOV 23 '64 H

404432

2623646

CANCELLED

DUE MAR '70 H

Wm. H. Prescott

MISCELLANIES

II.

CRITICAL

AND

BIOGRAPHICAL

Vol. XXI.

Montezuma Edition

Widener Library
3 2044 090 077 249